VEMBER

n

THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

John I. Cochrane
George Brydges Ro
W. C. Tuttle
Frederick Moore
Harold Lamb
Max Bonter
Captain Dingle
F. St. Mars
Lewis H. Kilpatrick
Henry C. Copeland
Charles Victor Fisc

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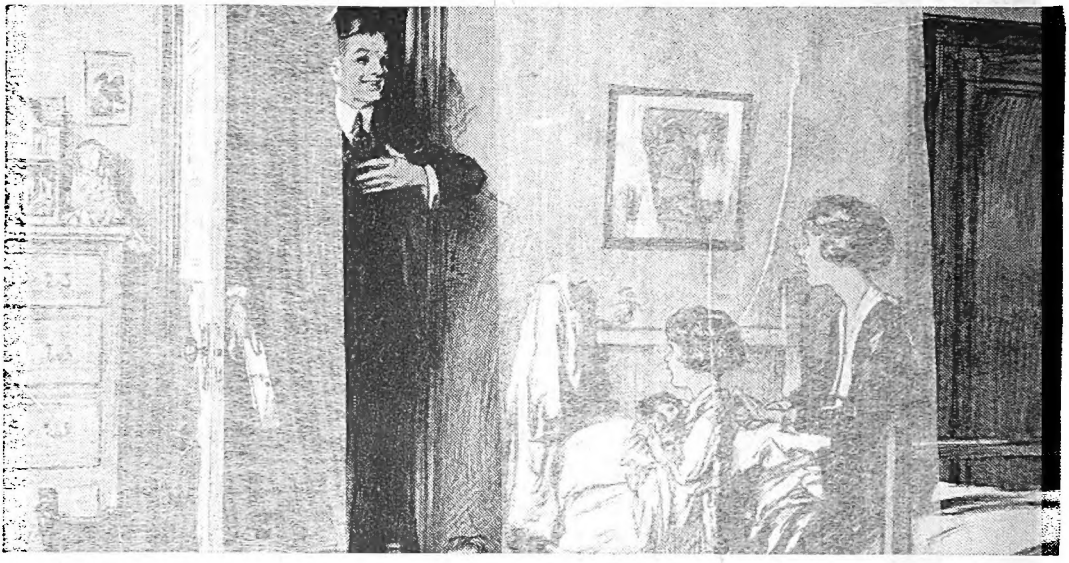

"They took me into the firm today!"

"I'm to be manager of the Eastern Division and my salary has been raised $300 a month.

"Think of it, Mary—three hundred more a month! And me! A member of the firm!

"Remember how we used to talk about it—dream about it? It seemed almost too much to even hope for.

"Remember the night I filled out that coupon and sent it to Scranton? We made a wish that night, Mary, and it has come true.

"One of the vice-presidents told me today that the first time he really knew I was around the place was when the International Correspondence Schools wrote him a letter, telling him I enrolled and had received a mark of 93 for my first lesson.

"I didn't know it, then, but they were sizing me up. The reason I was promoted so rapidly after that was because my studies were always fitting me for the job ahead.

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"Where would I be today if I hadn't sent in that coupon? Back in the same old job at the same old salary, I guess—always afraid of being dropped whenever business slacked up.

"The folks at the I. C. S. are right, Mary. The trained man always wins!"

* * * * * *

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- ☐ Electric Wiring
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- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
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- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILES
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ BANKING
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Teacher

Name.....

Street and No.....

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City ..... State.....

Occupation.....

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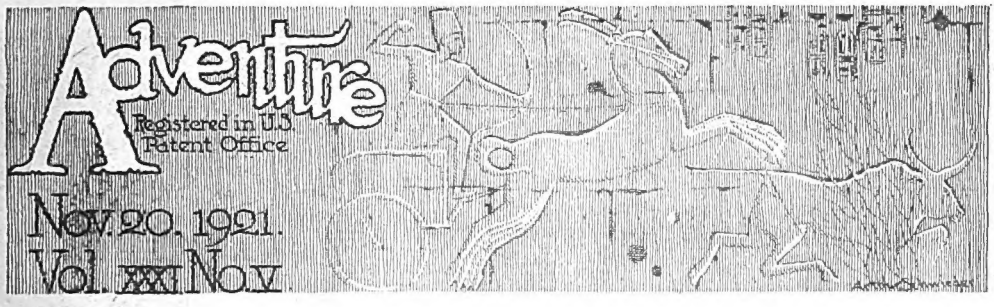

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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THE vivid story of a Zulu, from birth in the wild bush to the virile maturity of a man who has wives and children, and is a chief of warriors. Through all stages in the development of an *induna*—the terrors and ordeals of childhood, the wild menace of the open *veld*, witchcraft and the tests of manly courage, courting, hunting, wetting his stabbing-spear, the humor and horror of life in the kraal, the terrific raids of the Zulus—the tale unfolds the secrets of the savage mind and heart. "IN KAFFIR KRAALS," by Santie Sabalala, a pure-blooded Fingo-Kaffir, is a series of six sketches, each complete in itself, beginning with "Upina Survives through Childhood," in the next issue.

FROM his life among the redskins *Shoshoni Hale* comes back again to white men's ways—to find more intrigue, mystery and sudden death than ever the Indians knew. A story of the Boise basin in the old gold-crazy days is "LOST DIGGINGS," a five-part story by Hugh Pendexter that begins in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

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Author of "The Seven Cities of Cibola," "Adam's Earth," etc.

IN MAY of 1876 the snow was still lying deep on the flanks of the Black Hills in what is now South Dakota. Patches of that snow were stained red and brown in streaks and spots where the busy miners had shoveled the refuse from their pits and tunnels out onto the white hill-slopes. All Deadwood was busy, for all Deadwood knew very well that these cold Spring days alone in all the year were exempt from the dangers of an Indian foray. The coming of the grass a few weeks later would mean that the war-ponies could forage on the range. It would also mean the advent of the Sioux and Cheyenne war-parties, for the tribes bitterly resented the incursions of the White Men into the favorite hunting-grounds of the Red Men.

There were many who dared the Sioux and Cheyenne war-parties; who dared the terrible winters and the hardships of that bleak northern land; many who would have imperiled their immortal souls for a few pounds of the red gold that Professor Jenny had discovered there a few years before.

Jeremiah Lane was one of these. Of all the daring prospectors of the Black Hills he had come earliest and fared best, and now that the flood to the Hills had settled into a regular tide and Deadwood had become a town, he was glad that he had come; glad to spend his days in taking out the red gold from one or more of his many claims, and his nights in watching the stream of life swirl up and down the single narrow street that was all of Deadwood.

It was built on both precipitous sides of a deep gully, so that from the little porch in front of his cabin, as Jerry Lane was wont to say—

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"I can spit down the chimney of any man I don't like and put his fire out."

On this particular night Jerry Lane had a visitor in Doctor Ives, the only medicine-man in the diggings and the *fidus Achates* of the old prospector. They sat by a rough table in the big square room. A log fire crackled in the six-foot chimney and the frost-laden wind roared and rushed among the great pines outside, snatching at eaves and corner-logs till it seemed that something must give way to its demand.

Jerry Lane smashed his big hand down upon the table at which they sat in warm debate.

"By Cripes! I'll prove it to you, Doc. Why, man, you're worse than a tenderfoot with your fool's talk about iron-pyrites and such. Do you suppose that after thirty years of earth-grubbin' and rock-punchin' I don't know gold when I see it? Look here then——"

He strode across the creaking cabin floor, pulled aside a great white-tanned elk hide, rich with ochre-tinted pictures of Indian imagery for which a museum would have paid a king's ransom, and was gone for a moment. Doctor Ives heard him noisily flinging articles to and fro in the firelit dusk of the back room and presently he came back with a small skin sack in his hand.

"There — darn you — you Doubting Thomas! Look at that and believe."

He threw down the open bag, and the contents cascaded out upon the table; a handful of small nuggets of yellow metal that thudded dully upon the board.

Doctor Ives leaned forward; stared unbelievingly at the chunks of metal before him; started to whistle and then thought better of it.

"My Lord!" he whispered through lips that had suddenly gone dry. "Where did you get this, Jerry?"

"Iron-pyrites, of course," scoffed Jeremiah Lane. "Fool's gold is it? *What* is it, Doc—since you know so darned much about it? What is it?"

"Ham boiled in champagne! That's what it is!" came the answer. "My Fathers! Where did you get it, Jerry?"

"You can ask that, doc. A thousand men have been looking for thirty years for the lode that that ore came from. I can't tell you where it came from—at least I can't tell you the exact place."

Doctor Ives said nothing. He studied carefully the nuggets that Jerry Lane had decanted before him.

"Hm!" he growled presently. "I'll bet you a new hat that I can guess mighty close to where that came from. That wire gold—" he turned over a piece of gold-ribbed rock in his hands—"came from Upper French Creek."

"I'm needin' a new hat," quoth Mr. Lane imperturbably.

Doctor Ives looked at him long and hard across the table.

"Come across, Jerry," he said, "You don't want to start a stampede here at your age, do you? Own up and tell me where you got it."

Jerry shook his head in refusal; then he went to a little closet behind the curtain and came back with a bottle in his hand. He set it by a water-jar on the table and stood for a moment looking at his friend.

"Did you ever hear of the Blue Bucket Diggings, Nathan?"

"Good Lord!" Doctor Ives fairly jumped in his astonishment. "You surely don't mean that you believe any of that old prospector's tale, do you? You're not revamping that old tale surely."

"What do you know of it?" demanded Mr. Lane in a curiously still voice.

"I KNOW what every one used to say about it and what they said down in Denver. The tale is that in '47 a wagon-train was crossing to Oregon by the Overland trail; that it got too far to the north and had trouble with the Indians. They came finally to a place where a steep range of hills turned the river to the north. They took a short cut over the range with the wagons but sent the loose stock around by the river-bed so they would have plenty of water.

"The men who herded the cattle took with them two ordinary wooden buckets that were painted blue. When they went to water the cattle that night they found kind of a natural riffle in the creek bed and it turned out to be filled with lumps of soft yellow metal. They filled the two buckets with the nuggets and took them back to the wagons and gave them to the children to play with. You see those people were land hungry. They were going west for land and never gave a thought to gold. They didn't even think of it.

Some days later the wagon-train was

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jumped by the Sioux and it was wiped out—all but three people. These people of course had carried away with them some of the nuggets. When they had them assayed they turned out to be pure gold. Every year or so some party has set out to locate the Blue Bucket Diggings, but no one has ever found them yet—and no one ever will," he added viciously.

"Why not?"

"If it *was* gold, it was just a pocket and they undoubtedly stripped that pocket when they took out two bucketfuls. That's one mighty good reason."

"That account is pretty close to the real thing, Nathan. The only trouble is that you don't go quite far enough. Those nuggets came from the Blue Bucket Diggings and they were given to me by one of the three survivors of the attack on the wagon-train."

"Does he know where the place was?" demanded Doctor Ives with sudden interest.

"He has a rough map of it. He gave me the nuggets so I could have an assay made to satisfy myself, but he will not give me the map till I agree to go at once and alone to fin the place. We are to split fifty-fifty on what I find."

"Well— what ails you now?" demanded Ives sharply.

Mr. Lane was slowly and methodically stripping off waistcoat and shirt, and presently stood before him stripped to the hide.

"I want you to give me an expert opinion about my heart, doc," he said heavily. "It's been giving me a lot of trouble lately."

"That's news to me. What kind of trouble?"

"It starts with a severe pain in the chest over the heart. Then the left arm seems paralyzed. What is it?"

Ives thumped him on chest and shoulder, and listened attentively to his breathing.

"How does the pain come?"

"There is a sudden choking with a sharp pain. I can't make you believe how bad it is. It is simply——. What is it?"

He glanced at Ives whose face had suddenly become serious. Lane's gaze too became troubled.

"Do you reckon it could be tobacco-heart, doc?" he asked hopefully.

"No, you idiot. It sounds to me like the beginning of angina pectoris——"

"Well— how long will it be till I can pull out on the trail again, Doc? I was rather counting on leaving next week. I can't afford to waste any time."

Doctor Ives gave a great hoot of derision.

"A prospecting trip with a heart like that? With three feet of snow in the hills? You're a plain fool, Jerry. Since you have asked me for a professional opinion I'll be plain with you. You have made your last trip alone, man. And you say that you must go alone."

The old man's face went pale.

"But I tell you, doc, I've got to go. Do you mean that I'll die if I go?"

"No. That is, not necessarily. You may live to be a hundred years old. I do mean, though, that one attack of angina pectoris means another one later on. When you die you may die of angina pectoris or it may be something entirely different that will take you off. Any sudden exertion may bring on an attack and any attack may be fatal. Mind you, I say 'Maybe,' not 'Will be.' You have simply got to stop this business of wandering foot-loose through the hills with pack-pony and pick, Jerry. You must settle down to a quiet life."

"But, doc, I can't, and that's the truth. I can't till this matter—" he pointed to the heap of nuggets on the table—"is settled once and for all."

"Why not?" asked Ives equably. "You have made your pile, haven't you? What are you worth as you stand, Jerry?"

"That's for me to know and for you to find out," snapped Jerry Lane. "But there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you, seeing that I have named you as the executor of my will. When I die, if I do not lose what I have made already, I will cash in for about forty-five thousand dollars."

"Cash?" Doctor Ives looked surprized.

"No. I have it all out in bonds. They're always good. Forty-five thousand dollars in Union Pacific and in United States Three-per-cents. I've deposited all the bonds with the Wells-Fargo Company in Denver. They've got my instructions what to do in case I cash in. I'll show you the will."

He disappeared again behind the curtain and came back carrying a black tin box that was filled with papers.

"HERE it is—" He took a document from the box and tossed it to his friend. "You'll note that I have named you as executor without bond and that I am leaving all I have to my nephew,

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Ralph Keene. If he dies the entire estate will go to you. That is why I did not have you witness it. Under the law, a witness to a will can not inherit."

"I know. Well, Jerry, I hope you live for a thousand years and then are hung for horse-stealing. Who is this lucky nephew of yours? I never heard of him before."

"Ralph Keene? He is my sister's son. He is a college man. Yale 'Seventy-three, I believe. Took a course in mining engineering, and since then he has been fooling away his time about Denver and Cherry Creek. I have never seen him. He may be the best youngster in the world or the worst— Why?"

"It just occurred to me that since you have set your heart on investigating this matter of the Blue Bucket mirage you could not do better than to get this nephew of yours to come up here and give you a hand. Let him know that he is to be your heir. That will bind him to you tighter than wax. See?"

Jeremiah Lane smashed his big hairy hand down upon the table in grim approval.

"You're dead right, doc. And I will make him think that his inheriting my pile will depend on his doing as I say about the Blue Bucket. I may have a little trouble though about getting that map. The person who has it is only half-way willing. Just now the main thing, though, is to get the boy up here."

"Where is he now?"

"A month ago my sister wrote me that he was in Denver."

"Then you can bet that he is still there. Denver diggings are sure good for young men. Write your letter, Jerry, and I will get it sent off for you. If your letter finds him it will not be long till he is with you. Mind what I tell you about not taking violent exercise."

Jerry Lane looked long at him with a tight-lipped smile and picked up the bottle.

"Do you reckon this exercise is too violent, doc?" He filled his tumbler to the brim.

"Like that? Yes. Go mighty easy on that liquor, Jerry. I'll send you some medicine that will help you in case of another attack. They are capsules of nitrate of amyl. They come in little glass ampules and are called pearls. If you find that an attack is coming on—and a partial paralysis of the left arm will warn you sometimes —take one of the nitrate of amyl pearls, place it in a cloth, crush it and hold it to the nose and inhale it. It is very powerful and will give instant relief. Be careful of them, as I have a very small supply of them. You know there is no drug-store up here."

Jerry nodded.

"Good," he said. "You say they will give instant relief? With them on hand I'll feel like a drowning man who has just grabbed a life-preserver."

Ives bade him good night with great concern.

"Be sure you send the letter for your nephew down to me early in the morning. A wagon-train leaves for Cheyenne at daylight."

He banged the door behind him, turned up the collar of his heavy coat and started down the tortuous trail to his own house. The wind was rising and was blowing straight and strong from what is now Sheep Mountain. There was an edge to that wind, for it came straight from the snow-covered flanks of the Black Hills, and Ives shivered as he got the full force of the blast.

"Heir apparent to forty-five thousand dollars and me needing it far worse than he can possibly want it——"

He settled into his stride and plowed forward into the teeth of the wind.

CHAPTER II

TO THE end of his life Ralph Keene was never quite sure what made him look up from tightening the latigo on the pack-pony. It had worked loose while they were moving up a dry arroyo six miles back but he had put off tightening it hoping that it would hold till they should reach camp. Finally the saddle slipped and the top pack, two picks, a bucket and two axes, shifted. That settled it.

"Wait a bit, Pete." He swung out of his saddle. "That darned saddle's shifted again."

In a moment he straightened it, paused for a space to strike a match for his pipe and saw—the lean head of a *pintado* pony looking squarely at him from between two bushes on the top of the ridge two hundred yards to the north.

Today one can stop at any point on the road from Custer City to Deadwood for any purpose under heaven. A *pintado* pony

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without a bridle means nothing there now, but in May of 1876 it meant—Indians!

Ralph's heart leaped into his throat as he sprang into saddle.

"Get back, Pete! Back I say! There are Indians beyond the ridge——"

Peter Boyce, stocky, gray-bearded, old and a very wise Ulysses in frontier-lore needed no other word. He was too close to that ridge to stop to mount for he knew very well that any Indians that might be there would be well armed with the best weapons that the Department of Indian affairs could get for them. Any one could peddle arms to the warring tribes in the halcyon days of 'Seventy-six.

He did not pause to ask questions. He struck his pony a resounding smack with his open hand and as the horse broke into a frightened gallop he swung into seat and bending low raced up the ridge down which he had come a few minutes earlier.

They halted on the crest, while the pack-ponies grazed below them under cover, and looked about them. The *pintado* pony was gone and there was no sign of life across the stream. Ralph looked about him for a moment wondering vaguely what would happen next. Below him the wind was roaring through the tops of the cottonwoods in the creek-bottom, and a bit of tumble-weed rolled slowly along the far crest. Peter Boyce's voice, low, insistent, sounded in his ears.

"There are men behind that ridge, Ralph. You're right——"

"Of course there are; but how do you know it? You can't see 'em."

"Look at the prairie-dog holes on the south slope of the hill——"

He jerked his finger toward the hill. "When we was comin' down the hill there were a dozen 'Yekyeks' settin' on the tops of their burrows. There ain't one there now. They've all taken cover. What scared 'em? It wasn't us. We were too far away—by gosh!"

A muffled roar broke the afternoon hush. It was thrown back and to right and left among the waving tree-tops, and a heavy bullet spatted at his feet. He kicked a bullet-starred red rock contemptuously aside.

"Get back off the trail. There's no tellin' how many of 'em there are."

"Yes there is, too. Look there!" Ralph's finger pointed to the northwest. Four hundred yards up the gully a dozen men broke cover from the low brush that filled the creek-bottom. Followed a mad rush of ponies; white, bay, black and *pintado* across the watercourse through the boulders that lay to their left flank. Peter took one fleeting glance as he gathered up his reins and bent low in his saddle.

In that look he noted the feathered war-bonnets, the swinging shields and the heavy war-bows in their cases on the men's backs. Also he saw that every right hand carried a rifle. Most particularly he noted the paint that smeared every face and body in the party. He grunted his surprize.

"Cheyennes! By the Lord, son, we'll do well to pull our freight right quick. Get back as quick as we can and make for the main trail."

There was no time for argument. Back they went with a rush gathering up those astonished pack-ponies as they went.

"They'll try to flank us at the next 'wash.' Ride top speed to next gully and cut off to our left to hit the main trail to Deadwood. We're within a half-mile of it now. I wish to Heaven we hadn't taken this short cut. I never knew a short cut yet that there wasn't some good reason for not takin' it."

The next half-mile was a race with scalps for the prizes, for both knew well what would happen if the nippers of that half-moon shaped line of pursuers should ever close on them. Of all the northern tribes the Cheyennes were the most daring foemen. The Sioux were brave and crafty; the Crows and the Pawnees were beyond a doubt the most expert thieves; the Arapahoes were—Arapahoes; but the Cheyennes—the Cutarms—exceeded all in daring and in sheer deviltry, and they vied with the Sioux in the possession of the best arms and the most plentiful ammunition that one Department of the Government could supply to the foes of another.

"I don't understand the Cheyennes bein' so far over this way," panted Pete as they pushed their ponies down a steep bank and sent them scurrying among the boulders, picking soft ground wherever they could. "These ain't the Cheyenne huntin' grounds. These are the Sioux hills. If the Cheyennes are out this far to the north they must have made a deal with the Sioux——"

He struggled with his rifle that had stuck in the scabbard. It was a heavy Sharps

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buffalo gun of the type that was known locally as a "Beecher's Bible" from the current rumor that some years before Henry Ward Beecher had shipped several boxes to settlers in Western Kansas. These boxes were said to contain Bibles but when opened were found to carry Sharps rifles with a large supply of ammunition.

Finally Boyce wrenched it loose with a curse, lowered the lever and prodded with his thumb at the vicious looking black bullet that peeped up at him. That rifle would send a bullet through two buffaloes at three hundred yards.

"Henry's is all right," he said sententiously. "I ain't sayin' a word against Henry's, but for real work give me a heavy gun like this one. Give me a fifty caliber. There's no use sendin' a boy to do a man's work— There they go——"

CHIN on shoulder he reined in his sweating pony. Ralph checked his horse in mid-gallop. There, a scant three hundred yards behind and above them, silhouetted against the sky, their late pursuers had checked and grouped heedless of the Indian caution that bade warriors avoid the sky-line as the Devil is popularly supposed to avoid Holy Water. One tall warrior sitting his horse like a centaur was gazing steadily off to the southwest over the heads of the fleeing men. Peter Boyce noted it.

"Something beyond us is holdin' their attention. If it holds 'em just a minute longer—" He slipped from his horse and laid the barrel of the Beecher's Bible across the seat of his saddle. "Three hundred and fifty yards and another fifty for luck— Go get him old girl!——"

The rifle roared; the ball of white smoke shot skyward, and the old man swung into saddle with a grunt of approbation.

"I got him, darn him! He won't ride on any more raids, scarin' old men like me into fits. I wish I could scalp him clear down to the ears—Listen to 'em yell—Come on boy——"

Down they went, rocketing among the scrub, winding in and out among the rocks. As they crossed an open space Mr. Boyce's finger pointed to the south.

"There's what held 'em back. We can thank that for our lives."

It was a column of red dust that swung along the tree-tops, and it told plainly to all men that wagons were moving there. Farther to the north of that cloud another blot against the sky showed in a column of white smoke that carried a darker edging. Peter Boyce studied this last carefully.

"Now I wonder who is fool enough to make a fire like that when the Cheyenne war-parties are out. There have been skirmishes through here before, but this is the first time I've ever known of a war-party raidin' on the main trail to Cheyenne. See that smoke? Whoever built that fire didn't care whether anybody saw it or not. It's on the Deadwood trail. Come on——"

At the point where they struck the main trail it pitched down a gravelly bank into French Creek. The creek banks were covered with tall trees that stood in clumps, from one of which an ooze of black and white smoke trickled up. The two men drew near very cautiously, every nerve taut with apprehension. Suddenly Ralph threw up a detaining hand.

"Look," was all he said, but he pointed to a heap of smoking embers that was crowned by a half-burned wagon-wheel. The chaos took form to them as they rode closer.

"By —— ——!" The old man growled. "Look here, Ralph——"

There was no need to adjure him. Ralph Keene had already looked, and he was sick. White-faced and shaking he stood waiting for a word from the larger experience of his partner.

On the still smoking embers of a great fire, the ruins of a wagon smoked and blistered. On the trail immediately behind the place where the wagon had stood, lay the body of a woman so hacked and hewed as to be almost unrecognizable as being the remains of a human being. Near her lay the body of a man. He had been shot with arrows, and scalped. The Indians had not been content to simply take the scalp but they had skinned the head to the ears, and had cut off the hands and feet. Two tiny feet protruding from the fire told the silent white men that others besides adults had been killed.

The revolting sight sent Ralph sick and faint to lean upon his saddle while Peter Boyce, his mouth working, a dangerous light in his gray eyes, moved from point to point gleaning what information he could to tell him what had happened.

"They were killed while they were eatin' breakfast this mornin'—My Lord! Those devils that we saw back there did it and they

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have been all day at the work—How do I know? Look at the oatmeal in them dishes. People only eat oatmeal for breakfast. The water-buckets are empty too.

People fill water-buckets at night to use in the mornin'. It was that party of Cheyennes that we ran into back there, of course. This outfit was probably on the trail to Deadwood like we are and they camped here for the night so they would be close by the creek. The Cheyennes jumped 'em at daylight. They never had a chance, of course. Give me a hand, Ralph. We've got to bury these poor devils. Lordy! What fools people are to travel through Indian country without proper protection——"

"Like we're doing," Ralph reminded him.

"We don't count. Any man has a right to risk his own skin. Nobody but a fool would risk a woman's scalp—not for all the gold in the Deadwood diggin's.

"Are those diggings as rich as men say, Pete?"

"They beat even the diggings that Green Russell found when he hit Cherry Creek where Denver stands to-day. Stamfer—I knew him in 'sixty-seven—Stamfer always swore that he would make a fortune out of the Black Hills if the Sioux would only let him alone for six months. This here is the result. Give me a hand here, will you?"

THEY got enough unburned planks from that wagon-body and from the remains of another that they found in the brush to line the shallow grave that they scraped rather than dug with a broken shovel in the loose shale. When he had smoothed the red dirt over the poor bodies, Peter Boyce spoke again—

"Didn't you know what you'd be up against when you came up here?"

"In a way I knew, but I didn't think it would be as bad as this. It would have made no difference anyway. I would have come just the same. You see I got a letter from an uncle of mine who lives in Deadwood telling me to go up there to join him. You've been in Deadwood, Pete. Did you ever hear of Jeremiah Lane?"

"Jerry Lane—" Mr. Boyce's hand stopped midway in the act of conveying a plug of tobacco to his mouth. "Do I know Jerry Lane? Well, son, I reckon I do——"

"Well, he is my uncle."

"The —— you say," came the non-committal answer.

"What kind of a man is he, Pete? I have never laid eyes on him. He is my mother's brother. He heard that I was workin' a prospect down on Cherry Creek and he wrote to me to come up to Deadwood. What is he like?"

"You say you don't know him?" inquired Mr. Boyce carefully.

"I tell you I have never laid eyes on the man."

"Well you haven't missed a whole lot. Old Jerry's all right—in a way. Only it ain't my way. He made his pile down in the Colorado diggin's in 'Seventy-two and he's still got the first dollar he ever earned."

"Did he make his money honestly?" asked Ralph quickly.

"Well—yes. That is nobody ever caught old Jerry red-handed in holdin' up a stage, but he's never been known to let a dollar rest in the shade. Quite a lot of men have been hurt tryin' to deal with old Jerry, but I'm bound to say that they were generally hurt while they were tryin' to do to him what he done to them—only he done it first. So he's your uncle is he?"

"The only one I've got," said Ralph more cheerfully.

"Hm! One like Jerry's enough. What's that——?"

He sprang to his feet, dropping his hat, and stared off to the southwest where a column of red dust swirled up against the sky.

"That's the dust-cloud that scared those Cheyennes away from us," commented Mr. Boyce. "The trail turns off at a right-angle back there. This Deadwood trail is crowded today and I'm sure glad of it. We'd have been brained with a coup-stick a long time back if it hadn't been for that dust-cloud. I wonder what it is. Hear that?"

It was the unmistakable crack of a whip. The next moment two horses' heads appeared over the crest of the hill; then two more thrust through a wreath of red dust, and there clattered down toward them a heavy lumbering overland stage-coach.

With creak of leather and smell of horses' sweat, the whip cracking like rifle-fire, the team pulled up with a crash, and the driver, jamming the brakes hard down with both feet, sprang to earth swearing volubly. Ralph leaped to lend a hand, for the smell of

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the raw blood had set the lead-team crazy with fright and they were dancing in and out of the trail. While he wrestled with the horses' heads the doors of that coach flung open, and he stood gazing in open-mouthed astonishment as four girls sprang from the coach and stood staring at their surroundings? There was a breath-taking pause. Peter Boyce broke it.

"My ——," he shouted to a heedless world. "Has all the world gone plumb crazy? Drivin' through the Indian country, right on the heels of a Cheyenne war-party packin' a wagon-load of biscuit-shooters an' pot-wrastlers out of Cheyenne——"

CHAPTER III

THE driver of the stage gave a quick comprehensive glance about him as he slapped the dust from his trousers.

"What's been goin' on here, friends?" he asked.

Peter Boyce told him, speaking in a low tense tone that the openly curious girls could not hear. The man stood astounded, his mouth open in frank surprize.

"But if what you say is so, how in 'nation am I goin' to get through with a stage-load of women?"

Mr. Boyce shrugged his shoulders.

"Heaven knows! You was all kinds of a fool to try it. You ain't no tenderfoot neither from the looks of you."

"My name's Joe Weaver. I'm out of Hays City. I didn't want to come, but I signed a contract and I couldn't back out without people sayin' I was afeard to come. The —— of it all is that I *am* afeard—" Mr. Weaver grinned ruefully. "What's your name, friend?"

"Boyce. I'm just headin' in to Deadwood with my partner there."

"An' you say that you actually seen Indians back there?" Weaver pointed north with his chin, negro-fashion.

"We did a lot more than see 'em. They chased us for a half-mile and I killed one of 'em. The sight of your dust scared them off from us."

"Do you think I'd better turn back?"

"I know darned well you had better turn back, but a contract's a contract and it don't really make a whole lot of difference. The Sioux and Cheyennes are all over the country anyways. You're just as likely to run into them goin' back as you are by goin' forward. You'll be in Deadwood soon."

"Are you goin' there yourself?"

"Yes——"

"I'd like mighty well to have you and your partner trail in along with me. Two rifles would mean a lot if they jump me with these girls, and they may do it too."

"They probably will do just that," commented Mr. Boyce pleasantly. "What you're packin' a lot of skirts over the Cheyenne-Deadwood trail for when the Indian war-parties are out, beats me, but that's your business I reckon. Ain't the people down the river got any sense or has the sight of French Creek gold druv 'em crazy?"

Weaver gulped visibly.

"You wouldn't turn down a good job just for a few Indians, would you? Word came down to Hays City that women was wanted in the hash-houses in Deadwood. You know—helpers in the hash-houses, biscuit-shooters and pot-wrastlers — all kinds of women. That's why these four girls are goin' up with me. They signed a contract too."

Mr. Boyce shot a glance of keen appraisal at the four young women. Three of them glanced back as frankly. They were all young; they were all more or less personally attractive. Three of them were as coolly appraising him as he was them. It was the fourth girl who held his gaze.

She was young and she radiated the charm that goes hand-in-hand with youth. Masses of light brown hair were piled under a white felt hat whose broad brim supplied just the amount of shade needed to bring out the peach-blossom tints of her face. Perhaps her lips were a trifle too red; they showed like a new wound. But it was her eyes that held Peter Boyce; eyes of the brightest hazel with golden lights in them that shone and danced with a curious consuming fire that told of lightness and laughter with just a suspicion of latent fire behind them that might at any moment burst into flame.

Peter Boyce was suddenly aware that Ralph too was watching the girl. He had not moved since he had wrenched open the coach door, but now he came forward just missing the rest of Weaver's speech.

"—an' pot-wrastlers. Any woman kin get a job today in Deadwood, they say——"

"Provided she don't care what kind of a job it is." Mr. Boyce's tone bit like acid.

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"Most of 'em don't care. That one is different." Weaver nodded toward the girl. "She's different. Her name is Mary Preston. She took the job that was offered her at the last minute just as the stage was pullin' out. I went over to Hays City for 'em and found that one had backed out at the last minute. This girl wanted to come so she signed up an hour before we left. They've got a contract with Jane Dalton—you've heard of her, I reckon?"

"Calamity Jane! I reckon I have heard of her. Who hasn't? She's like three aces; good to have with you; plumb —— to have against you. What's she got to do with this layout?"

"Calamity has staked Hank Gibbs to a hash-house layout they say and she is rustlin' the girls for waitresses. That's all."

"Hm! So you say—" Mr. Boyce was frankly sceptical. "You know, and I know too, the kind of women who come up here to the new diggin's. I have just buried one of the good ones. The other kind is still in Deadwood. What did you say the girl's name is?"

"Preston, she said."

"I wonder if she's any kin to Tom Preston."

The girl heard the words. She came forward.

"Thank goodness," she cried. "You know my father, don't you? I just heard you mention his name. He is Tom Preston and I am on my way to Deadwood to find him. When did you see him last?"

Mr. Boyce hesitated.

HE WAS perturbed in spirit. He did not feel that he could tell this pretty girl with the brave eyes all that he knew and had heard of Tom Preston. Of Tom Preston the prospector who was under suspicion of having cheated his own partner, the sin without pardon among miners; of Tom Preston who ran the crooked faro layout in Cherry Creek; of Tom Preston who bore a shady name in twenty different places where shady men were numerous.

"Where did you last see him?" insisted the girl.

"Well, miss, I haven't seen him for about a year. It was when I was last down on Cherry Creek."

"But he came to Deadwood after that——"

"Very likely, miss. Men run about like quicksilver out here. You say he's in Deadwood now?"

"I heard so. That's why I'm going there. To find him you know——"

"You're choosin' a mighty dangerous time to try to make Deadwood, miss—" he turned abruptly to Weaver. "You'd better pull out as soon as you kin. The best time to travel through a bad country is right after a war-party has gone through it. Nobody but a fool would do it and people don't look for fools out here. They don't live long as a rule. Me and my partner will trail along with you."

Very quietly, for though they had been told nothing in words yet the girls had sensed tragedy in the air and in the smoking embers that still lay by the trail, they climbed into the stage coach. Weaver climbed to his high seat, threw off the brakes and started his horses up the trail with his new friends riding well to the front as they topped the rise.

"Did you find out who they are?" Ralph edged toward Peter Boyce as he asked the question.

"The driver told me a little. He may be a liar though; most men are when it suits 'em." He briefly told Ralph what he had learned.

"Hm!" Ralph rode for fifty yards with his chin on his shoulder. He was studying Mary Preston's pretty face as she peered out over Weaver's shoulder. "What do you think of that, Pete? Do you believe it?"

"There's no reason why I shouldn't. It sounds reasonable."

"What?"

"Why that Calamity Jane is bringin' a lot of girls into the new diggin's. She has done it before. That's one of her games—" Mr. Boyce spat as one spits at the thought of an unclean thing. "My ——, boy! You don't know this place. Even in the best of times a minin' camp is plain —— but when they take to runnin' women into it, the only kind of women that will come, it puts the gilded roof on it. Me? I don't see why a man can't go out into the hills, scratch out a poke full of red dust and get back to the —— holes that he has made already.

"I can't see why every place where gold is found has got to be turned into a sink-hole for every drunken scoundrel who ain't

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worth the powder to blow him up. There 're Denver an' Dodge City an' Cheyenne. Ain't they enough, but they've got to make Deadwood like 'em. I came up here with Professor Jenny. He was the government man they sent up to look into the reports of gold in the Black Hills. We named them the Black Hills because of the pine forests on 'em. You can see 'em over there—" He pointed to the black tree line of the northwestern hills. "I saw the place and spotted the gold and then I saw what was comin' and I pulled out. I'm goin' back into them because I busted flat down below, and a man has to live. When I make my stake I'm goin' to quit for keeps. I guess that girl don't rightly belong in that bunch. It don't look right. She's a daughter of Tom Preston.

"He had a partner down in Colorado some years ago. His name was—now what was that man's name—I remember it was 'pull Dick; pull Devil' between them all the time. One wouldn't trust the other. There was a mix-up because one of 'em shot a Mexican who was workin' for 'em and each swore it on the other. If it had been anybody but a Mexican there would have been trouble and the crowd would have lynched them both. As it was they both got clear. Then they broke up the partnership and separated——"

"You knew my uncle too—Jeremiah Lane—" Ralph reminded him.

"My gosh!" The old man looked at Ralph uncertainly. "Why, son, I believe my mind is failin' me. Jerry Lane was Tom Preston's partner. How did I come to forget that."

Ralph stared at him through the heat-haze that swung and eddied among the rocks.

"Well—?" he said finally.

Peter Boyce drew a long breath and passed the back of his hand across his forehead. "I had clean forgotten it till you spoke" he said. "I reckon I'm gettin' old."

"But why should a young girl like Miss Preston be hunting for her father up here in the Indian country?"

"From what I remember of Tom Preston there was only two people who would look for him at all. One is his daughter who is bound to him by fambly ties. The other is an Indian to take his —— scalp and when he's got his scalp he's got the only part of him that's worth anything. Get up there, darn you!" Mr. Boyce drove his spurs into his loafing pony and rocketed forward in a cloud of dust.

MILE after mile they put behind them; mile after mile of pleasant grass-land and long green swales; of tiny creeks filled with cotton-woods and aspens while beyond them to the west, looming as dark as fate, rose the forbidding line of the Black Hills. No wonder that the Sioux had clothed their talk of those hills with outrageous superstition. No wonder that they had peopled those rocky gorges and deep defiles with personal devils and gods of good and evil report. It was so to them. It was the finest hunting-ground in all their broad domain and it was the home of strong medicine; of medicine good and bad; especially bad; the place where the wildest tales were true. But where there is gold there is also adventure. Professor Jenny had reported the gold that others before him had discovered and the place was doomed. Perhaps the devils of the bad medicine that the medicine men of the Indians talked of were the real devils that abode in the deposits of red gold. Certainly they acted like it.

For hour after hour the travelers rolled along toward the north. Time and again as they rocked along the trail where it crossed a broad mesa, Ralph found himself looking back, hoping to catch a glimpse of Mary Preston, but the girl was elusive. Perhaps she knew that the best way to enhance the value of a thing is to make it difficult of attainment.

Late in the afternoon they stopped at a little creek crossing. There could be no danger of Indians there with the flat land on all sides of them, as bare as the back of a woman's hand. Ralph let his horse drink and in so doing delayed till the lead team splashed into the ford alongside him. A babel of laughing voices greeted him.

"Hello, Stuck-up! Too proud to talk to us, are you?"

He grinned as he answered.

"No. Too busy lookin' out for your hair, miss——"

"Oh! You make me tired. All this talk of Indians is a fake. Say, Georgia, look at the Indian killer——"

Still laughing, Ralph drew up by the box where Mary Preston was seated. The

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other girls promptly drew back offended by his evident preference.

"Tired, Miss Preston?"

"A little," she confessed. "How long will it be till we reach Deadwood?"

"My partner tells me that that long ridge to our right over there is Strawberry Ridge. He says we will be in in an hour. Have you never been here before?"

"Never. I would not be coming here now if I were not looking for a missing father."

"We're kindred spirits then. I'm lookin' for an uncle I have never seen."

"Out of the way there an' give me room," shouted the driver. "I'm aimin' to take that bank with a rush."

He gathered his team and flung it at the crossing. They took it with a rush and they were off on the last lap of their journey. The sun had sunk behind the rim of the hills as they rattled up the rough trail that led to the outskirts of the town.

"There she is," quoted Mr. Boyce suddenly. "There's Deadwood——"

"The name is sure appropriate. Read that, will you——"

Ralph pointed to a tall pole that had been planted by the side of the roadway. To the top of the post was nailed a piece of board on which was painted in rude letters with red paint the sign:

$500 REWARD
FOR THE FIRST INDIAN HEAD—
NOT A SCALP
BRING IT TO THE 66 SALOON

"Indians must be darned promiscuous about here for 'em to be puttin' a head-tax on 'em," quoth Mr. Boyce grimly. "This business of advertizin' for heads in the very town means that the Indians are gettin' particular in their attentions to minin' parties. I guess what we heard about the Sioux an' Cheyennes is true. Come on."

The evening air gripped them with a cold hand. The sky had changed from blue to gray and then to black through which the stinking coal-oil lamps threw streaks of grimy radiance. Barrooms, restaurants, gambling houses and others of worse repute were lighting up for business. Ralph Keene was aware of a compelling force that seemed to overwhelm him; of a force that pressed and pressed upon him, gripping heart and brain. Was it a warning? And if so was it for good or for ill?

"Where to, Pete?"

"We'll head in for the First Chance," said Mr. Boyce's even voice. "Where are you all goin' to, Weaver?"

Weaver had already pulled up his exhausted team by the edge of the track in front of a yawning saloon before which a score of curious men had gathered to see who would come in on the stage.

"Here's the boss now. Here's the one who pays me—" Weaver indicated a slim, dark figure that came out to meet the coach and stood for a moment in the glare of the street light that was hung on a nail in the face of the saloon. The figure was dressed in rough coat and trousers that were tucked in heavy boots. The coat collar was turned up about the neck and Ralph noted vaguely that a pair of heavy pistols hung from a broad belt. The hair that showed below the heavy felt hat was cut short to the line of the neck and the dark eyes shone and twinkled menacingly. It was a good-looking face in a heavy, sensuous way.

"All right, Weaver! Take the girls over to my place. I'll be there in a minute. When you've done that come back here and git a drink."

There was a curious timbre in the voice that made Ralph peer sharply at the speaker through the dusk. He saw out of the corner of his eye that Mary Preston was also staring hard at the "boss."

"He looks like a mighty young fellow to have the responsibility for a stage load of girls," Ralph commented to Peter Boyce.

The old man snorted.

"Come on to the First Chance and we'll try to find a place to sleep. If you ever see that young fellow again, son, you mind that you steer clear of him. He's pizen. He ain't nothin' by hisself, but he's got a followin' of thieves an' cut-throats that you'll never get till you die and go to ——"

"Nice character you're givin' him. Who is he?"

"That," said Mr. Boyce succinctly, "was Calamity Jane. Come on to grub."

They went.

CHAPTER IV

THE First Chance was more of a saloon than a hotel. A great bar-room ran perpendicular to the street and at the far end of the main room a long corridor gave access to a score of tiny bedrooms. These

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sleeping boxes, for they were no more than that, alone gave the place its title as hotel.

"Bed you down? Of course—" The bar-tender stopped his legitimate work long enough to answer Mr. Boyce's inquiry. "Second room out to the left of the corridor. Pack your own washin' water. Soap an' towel is free. Better use that towel early. It's popular.

"Where's your corral?"

"Out back. Where'd you suppose it was? In the bedroom?"

"He's a polite son-of-a-gun, ain't he?" Mr. Boyce turned grinning to Ralph.

The bar-tender grinned back apologetically.

"Say, stranger, if you was kept as busy as I am a-mixin' drinks that I never heard of, you'd get sharp too. That there is an old joke about the corral. Where'd you come from?"

"Cherry Creek diggin's. We packed in this evenin'. How's business?"

"It's the same old thing. You put thirteen dollars in the ground for every dollar that some greaser takes out. You'll be wantin' grub, I reckon——?"

"You can bet we do! Where do we get it?"

"There's a greaser joint next door but one. Beans and tortillas is what you'll get."

"Then beans an' tortillas is what we want," said Mr. Boyce affably. "The Civil War was fought on beans an' whisky. Come on, Keene."

Together they strode out into the street, got their ponies and by devious paths finally got them to the corral that stood at an angle of forty-five degrees behind the house. When they had fed their ponies they carried their saddles to their room and after a sketchy wash sought the "beanery" where they were to eat.

"It's a choice place, Pete." Ralph looked distastefully about the dirty interior. The house was built half-frame, half-canvas, and like all the other buildings on that street—and it was the only street—the place was dominated by its barroom. That bar occupied the front half of the place. A dozen men stood at the bottle-laden counter and at a small table in the center of the room five men argued with the fluent profanity of the partially drunk. The least drunken man pounded vigorously on the table to enforce his views.

"An' he was the best sleight-o'-hand performer that I ever seen. He showed us some of his tricks an' they was good. I tell you they was good. He shot a gold watch into Peg-Leg Oates's pocket an' he pulled a live rabbit outen another man's ear. I paid him ten dollars to learn me a good trick and he sure did learn it to me good. It is a darned good trick, too. I'll show it to you— Wait!— Pedro——"

The grinning Pedro, scenting a generous tip, strolled over to the table.

"Git me some eggs, Pedro. About half a dozen——"

Pedro dived behind the smelly bar and presently emerged with both hands filled with eggs—and eggs in Deadwood were worth two dollars apiece. Suddenly the front door banged open and a tall, lanky cow-puncher strode up to the bar.

"Evenin', gents. What's your brand of pi'zen? Bar-keep, give me a little of your plain old Cow-puncher's Delight."

He dropped his sombrero on the bar and passed the bottle from the bar-tender's ready hand down the line of waiting men that had promptly formed at his invitation.

The demonstrator placed the eggs on the table and was looking around the room for something when he saw the high-crowned sombrero that the new arrival had placed upon the bar. His face immediately brightened.

"That'll do," he said quickly. "Give me that——"

Before any one could stop him he seized the hat, placed it brim up between his knees and cracking egg after egg he deftly dropped the yolks into the tall hat.

The sudden silence that ensued made the stranger turn to see what had happened. He wheeled just in time to see the contents of the last egg drop into the crown of his hat.

"See here!" His voice rose to a yell. "What the —— are you doin' with my hat?"

"Steady man! He says he's goin' to do a good trick with it. He says he paid a man ten dollars to learn him this trick. Don't interrupt him. Wait and see, stranger. He says he's good at tricks."

"He'd better be good at *that* trick. I paid eighty dollars for that sombrero. What's he doin' with it?"

The performer gave a drunken half-giggle.

"Keep your eyes on me now, gen'lemen.

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Keep your eyes right on me. It's the quickness of the hand what deceives the eye. I'm aimin' to make an omelet right in the gen'leman's hat while he waits. A fine, red-hot, pipin' omelet that'll taste just like the kind that mother used to lay—I mean make—I paid ten dollars to learn this here trick——"

"I sure hope you've learned it right—" The stranger drew nearer to the table. "I don't want to deceive you none, neighbor—" He reached back and "drew" and the sharp, staccato "click-click" of a heavy revolver broke the silence. "I ain't a man for idle threats and anyways this ain't a threat. It's a promise. I tell you plain that I'm hungry and when you mentions omelet you sure tickled my appetite. I ain't aimin' to plague the cook by talkin' too much, but when that hat comes back to me, you'd better be mighty sure that she's filled with a red-hot, appetizin' omelet, the kind you spoke of. If she ain't pipin' hot like you said, I'm goin' to put a forty-five bullet where you stacks your cold drinks."

A HORRID silence fell over all the room. The men standing by the bar drew back unostentatiously leaving a six-foot lane behind the newcomer. The men standing by the bar also withdrew and the bar-tender retired to the front of the room where he vainly hoped that a filled whisky barrel would shelter him. He had no mind to furnish a target for a drunken marksman.

Sudden sweat started out upon the face of the quondam performer. Sobriety, like the backwash of a great wave enveloped him, leaving him struggling for breath and sanity. He remembered the first part of that trick very well—the borrowing of the hat and the breaking of the eggs. That always had produced a laugh. He remembered very well the gasps of delight in the audience a month before when a full dozen eggs had been broken in the hat of a tenderfoot. Just now, though, something had happened. The rest of the trick seemed somewhat hazy— There had been something done that had been followed by something else, but what it was the tortures of the Inquisition could not have recalled to his fleeting memory— What was it?——

In the meantime the bore of that frightful cannon in the hand of the stranger followed his every move. The barrel pointed squarely at the pit of his stomach in which a distinctly cold feeling had begun to develop. Squirm as he would that pistol muzzle followed him all around the table.

"Ain't you most done with that omelet?" inquired the cow-puncher with ominous politeness. "I'm kind of particular about my vittles bein' served on time. Hurry it up a bit, pardner. I hope for your sake it's as good as you said it would be."

"Give me a fork, Pedro! Quick, man!—" The performer's voice was a frightened cackle. "An' Pedro, bring some bread and butter, too. You'd better put the coffee on the table where the gen'leman can git it. You all'll be some surprized when you git this mess——"

"I lay I will be. An' you'll be more surprized if I don't git it. Hurry up, I say."

By this time perfect stillness had fallen over all the room while men watched eagerly to see the developments. They sensed tragedy in the very air. The would-be prestidigitator knew very well that his life depended upon his cleverness. His wits alone could save him. He knew that when the owner of that hat should see the unsavory mess that he had made in the crown of that eighty-dollar sombrero, red murder would be done.

"All in good time, my friend! All in good time. Remember that the layin' of only one egg is a whole day's work for one law-abidin' hen— Say, Pedro——"

"*Cosa señor*——"

"Git the salt and the pepper fer the gen'leman. I'm aimin' to give him a supper that he'll never forgit. Git a lot of pepper and salt, Pedro——"

Pedro rapidly shoveled into a plate a great handful of salt and roughly ground black pepper with a generous spoonful of the red pepper so dearly loved by his own people.

"Now—" The man set the hat upon the table by the simple process of smashing it down upon the crown whereat the owner audibly ground his teeth— "Now." He extended his hands over the hat. "You will all observe that I ain't got no fire an' you're sayin' to yourselves, 'How's he goin' to cook that 'ere omelet? You all don't know when it's done but I know—I know it's done right now— Kindly hand the gen'leman a plate, Pedro.

Pedro thrust a plate into the half-extended left hand of the stranger. He took it, for the very good reason that it is not in

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human nature to refuse to accept anything that is offered to the hand.

"Now a knife and fork——"

"Time enough fer that when the vittles is served," said the cow-puncher grimly. "I ain't aimin' to let go of my shootin' iron till I see that omelet."

"All right! All right! Nobody but you is doubtin' me. Shall I season it fer you?" He made a motion as though to take the salt and pepper.

"Never mind that. You've put enough into that hat the way she stands. I'll do my own seasonin'."

"Just as you feel about it, sir. Here she is—" He picked up the hat and came forward with the pepper-laden plate in the other hand. "Hold your plate, please——"

The man held out his plate, shame-faced expectancy in his gaze.

"Here's your omelet—" He extended the hat. "An' here's your seasonin'—"

And before any one could have raised a hand to stop him, he threw full into the man's face the entire contents of the plate, salt and black pepper with the fiery red pepper of the Mexicans. The hat fell to the floor and the unsavory mess of eggs splashed over the bystanders. A half second later the amateur prestidigitator was through the door and a hundred yards down the crowded street.

The heavy pistol barked behind him and a roar of Gargantuan laughter made the reeking lamps clash and rattle.

"YOU sure blooded him, stranger." A man stamped over to the door and after examining the floor came back laughing. "You only creased him, I reckon." He pointed to a drop of blood on the floor and to a line of small drops that led to the street. "Who was the fool?"

"Tom Preston. He's been drunk for a week. He's made a dozen plays, but they all petered out. Him and Iron-hook Bates found a good location an' staked out a claim. Then they salted it an' sold it to a tenderfoot fer two hundred dollars. All *he* done was to take eighteen thousand out in a week. Tom's had a cramp in the stomach ever since."

"That's your uncle's ex-partner," snickered Peter Boyce. "Listen, will you——"

It was a full half-hour before the laughing uproar had subsided. When quiet was partially restored which was not till the angry cow-puncher had swallowed six drinks as rapidly as the contractions of his throat would allow, Peter Boyce motioned to Ralph.

"Let's hunt our flea-bags, son. I'm about all in. You can hunt your uncle up in the mornin'. We'll stop in at the Sixty-Six saloon for a night-cap."

They picked their way across the crowded floor and down the street to the biggest saloon in Deadwood and disregarding a dozen invitations to drink they drew clear to the back of the hall. The long room had suddenly filled and the big men weaved in and out among the groups that gathered in the smoke-laden room. Chuck-a-luck, roulette and poker tables had appeared as if by magic and a number of girls in tawdry finery and short skirts moved laughingly from table to table, drinking, joking and exchanging questionable jokes with the men who were not engaged in gambling.

"Look there." Ralph's hand gripped Peter Boyce's shoulder. "There is one of the girls who came up on the stage with us a while ago. It hasn't taken her long to get her war-paint on."

Pete's gaze followed the pointing finger. There, sure enough, was the same girl who had talked with them that very morning. It suddenly rushed through Ralph Keene's mind with the appalling shock of a lightning bolt that this girl had been the companion of Mary Preston, and that both had come to Deadwood on jobs under the same contract.

"Can this be the job that they were promised, Pete? Is this the kind of employment that she signed up for?"

"I don't know who *she* is," said Mr. Boyce astutely: "But I reckon this is what they draw."

"Drink, gentlemen?" The girl laughed in their faces. "Buy a bottle of champagne. It will only set you back thirty dollars. Whisky's four dollars a pint or fifty a throw. Buy the champagne," she whispered: "I get a bigger percentage on that."

"Sure we will. Two bottles, miss. Sit down and help us drink 'em."

Still smiling, she perched on the arm of Peter Boyce's chair and sat toying with a glass, disregarding loud-voiced invitations from other men to join them.

"How do you like your new job, miss?" inquired Peter Boyce politely.

"So, so. It's all right. It's a bit rougher than we thought it would be, but it'll be all

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right after a little. It's a good bit tougher than we had down below, though—" She tilted her head toward Denver. "Say! I feel sorry for that poor kid who came in with us. She's in a bad stew."

"What kind of a stew?" drawled Ralph lazily. He feared to show interest, for people as a rule only give information to those who apparently do not especially care to receive it. Manifested interest closes most mouths.

"That Preston girl. She thought when she came up here that she was signin' a contract to sling hash in a restaurant. She's the one that you were stuck on—" She laughed in Ralph's face. "She really didn't know what she was drawin'. Of course me an' Nell Rivers and Georgia Dow all knew what was what, but the Preston kid was new to it. Well—when we had got supper tonight, Calamity Jane took us to our rooms and gave us our clothes. The rooms are right out back there—" She waved her hand toward the back of the long room. "Her eyes nearly popped out when she saw what she was to wear.

" 'Where do I wait? Where's the hotel'? she asks Calamity.

" 'THIS here's the hotel,' says Calamity, pointin' to the bar-room, And you won't have long to wait. Your hours are from eight at night till two in the mornin'. After that your time is your own. You'd better be changin' your clothes. You ain't got much time till the customers begin to come in. You'll serve drinks in the big room there'.

" 'I will not serve drinks in any room,' says the girl sharp-like.

"Calamity cooled off mighty quick for her. You know what she generally is." Mr. Boyce nodded, his eyes little points of light. "Well, by accident, she was cold sober. She just said: 'Oh, you'll serve drinks in there, all right. You'll change your mind when you've had time to think it over. Come on——' "

"Well——?"

"Well, nothin'. The poor little fool believed all that Calamity told her and she went to her room to get ready for a bath. When she was takin' her bath, Calamity went to her room and took her clothes away and left her just what she might have expected if she'd known Calamity—just what I've got on——" The girl extended her pretty feet— "No more than this. Cry! Why you can hear her now out back there——"

She drew them to the door that opened into the corridor to one side of a rough stage that filled the rear of the long hall. On that corridor the bedrooms of the girls opened. Subdued sobs came from one of the rooms. Ralph turned indignantly on the girl.

"Do you mean to say that that woman, Calamity Jane is forcing a decent girl into this kind of life?" he demanded hotly.

"What's the matter with this life?" a thick, heavy voice droned in his ear.

He turned to face the slim, dark stranger who had met the stage coach when it drew up at the side of the street.

"What's the matter with this life? Don't you like it?"

"Who in —— are you?" demanded Ralph hotly.

"Oh, I'm nobody a-tall. Just Calamity Jane Dalton. Got anything to say about it?"

"You're mighty well named. I want to see Miss Preston."

"You sure can see her. Come right into the barroom. She'll be in there in a minute. She'll be servin' drinks there in a few minutes."

"If she does—" began Ralph. "If I find her serving drinks there against her will, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll pay her for what you buy from her and you'll very likely drink 'em with her. If you don't, somebody else will. Don't forget that."

Calamity Jane swung off down the corridor, both guns swinging at her belt, tapping her hips as she walked, while Peter Boyce fairly pinned Ralph against the wall, holding him with both hands against the flimsy partition till the light timbers cracked.

"Keep still, you fool," he cautioned. "Keep still a minute and don't talk. A shut mouth catches no flies. Wait, can't you? Wait——"

CHAPTER V

FOR three weeks after Ives had sent the letter for Jerry Lane he was the busiest man in the Deadwood diggings. A doctor of no mean ability he had found that a cheerful, optimistic outlook on life acts like a good circulating medium. It is always so. Taciturnity is no more proof of success in business than silence is a proof of

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wisdom. Even a burro seldom brays, but when he does men heed him.

When he had despatched the letter that was to bring Ralph Keene to the northern diggings, Ives went about his legitimate business, and there was plenty of it. Red-blooded men who go abroad with sixguns at their hips and the intent to use them if the occasion arises always find that the occasion does arise. Unlimited whisky, most of it bad, does not reduce the percentage of accidents. Add to this combination free gold and light women, and surgical practise picks up.

Deadwood was merely one long street that followed the line of a tortuous gully. That gully had once been filled with trunks of long dead trees, hence the name that was given to the diggings. Every third building was a saloon and the Sioux war-parties raided to the very back doors of the houses.

It was no unusual thing for an Indian warrior to lie up on the hill above the settlement and lob his bullets into the crowd of men going to work in the early morning. This habit of the Indians was the reason for the signs that men had posted on the edge of the town offering a reward for the first Indian head.

With all his loquacity and apparent ingenuousness no one had ever heard Nathan Ives offer any reason for his residence in Deadwood. Of course men always assumed a reason; the same reason that had brought them there; the desire to get quickly the gold that was so freely taken from the rich placer diggings in the valleys. In Ives' case his generosity toward his less fortunate patients made this reason seem unlikely if men had stopped to give the matter thought, which they rarely did. They took Ives at his own valuation which was large, and as matters stood in Deadwood, no one knew anything of his past life except that he had come in among the first arrivals; that he lived simply and worked hard and was always ready to help the less fortunate. Memorial hospitals have been dedicated to men who have done less than that.

He and Jerry Lane had taken to each other from the very first as only opposites do, and Jerry, the rough, unscrupulous prospector who had never hesitated to take any step that seemed an inch on the safe side of the law, provided only that it would turn a dollar into his pockets, found a friend in Nathan Ives.

Ives had been astounded to learn that Jerry had managed to acquire so much money. He had known in a general sort of way that Jerry was credited with having the Midas touch and that he had money down South in the Colorado diggings. He had heard that Jerry had grub-staked several of his one time partners and he knew that he had lost money on some of those ventures. Best of all, he knew—for Jerry was won't to wax garrulous on this last—that one partner in particular, Tom Preston, had got his knife under the old man's hide and had lifted several square feet of it for several thousand dollars.

The matter had been as simple as holding up a stage. Jerry had grub-staked him and Preston had disappeared in the hills. When he came back, three months later, he had reported his trip a failure and a little later he managed to cash in to the tune of about eighteen thousand dollars. When Jerry Lane had discovered this he could not think up enough bad names to call Tom Preston. Jerry was an unimaginative sort of man.

For several weeks after he had sent that letter for Jerry Lane by the wagon train to the South, Ives found his thoughts recurring again and again to the confidential disclosure that Jerry had made to him about his will. The fact that he had been named as a possible beneficiary under it took him entirely by surprize and he realized that his chances of inheriting the property were but slight. If Jerry Lane had never told Nathan Ives that he had been named in his will, Ives would never have thought of it nor would he ever have given a thought to any estate that his old friend might bequeath. But now all was different.

Who was this youngster, Ralph Keene, who came between him and his night's rest? No doubt he was a vicious, underbred boy who would certainly make ducks and drakes of any money that might be left to him, and who would be better off without any money that was so easily come by. The only kind of money that did one good in this world was money that was hard to get. To be sure the youngster was a nephew of Jerry, but what right had a nephew whom the old man had never even seen to come in from the Back of Beyond and inherit a sum of money that he had never even heard of? Money that

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would otherwise have come to him—Nathan Ives—who needed it.

And he did need it badly. There was no question about that. No one knew it, for when Nathan Ives told stories about himself they never contained the undiluted truth. No one in that western land knew how badly he needed money. He and he alone knew that he could never go back to the East for which his very heart yearned till he should be able to make good a deficit of some fourteen thousand dollars.

SOME five years before, his brother, dying, had left his estate to his two young daughters, naming Nathan Ives executor without bond. He had loved Nathan well. Those two nieces were still at a select boarding-school in Baltimore where they would be safe for the two years that must elapse till the accounting of that estate was due. To be sure at the end of those two years he must have the money or the law would ask impertinent questions, and Maryland law was an evil thing to trifle with.

Time and again he had regretted that foolish venture and the bad luck that had led him to place the little fortune of his nieces in a Honduras rubber plantation. In those days rubber was but little known and, unfortunately for Ives, the president of that company believed that he needed the money much more urgently than the investors did. Besides that, they could go to work and earn more, a thing which he could not do.

"If only Ralph Keene would not turn up." Ives found himself speculating on this possibility time and again till at times it seemed as though the wish were bound to come true from the very force of the desire. "If he would only fail to materialize and then something would happen to Jerry Lane—" he reflected moodily poking in the ashes of his fire, for the weather was cold even in late May in Deadwood. "If an attack of that angina pectoris were to take off old Jerry as it was most probable that it some day would— Well, then— Then, indeed, things would be different. But it would not help in the least unless Jerry were to be taken before Ralph should disappear, for that would simply mean a new will."

He sat staring moodily at the smoking embers, perhaps seeing faces and events in them; certainly weaving from their eddying wreaths a tissue of hopes and vain imaginings. The more he thought of the will of Jeremiah Lane the more he seemed to need those forty-five thousand dollars.

"It sounds almost like the plot of an old-fashioned three-volume novel," he reflected. "All that is needed now is for a baby to turn up with a long-discarded wife of Jerry Lane and a wicked nurse. As for the villain——"

Could it be written that he was cast for the villain? He squirmed inwardly at the very thought. With all his dreamings and covetousness he had never foreseen that this special devil would beset him. But men do not give way to the devil without having to entertain him, and he is an expensive guest.

Was he indeed cast for the villain? The question recurred to him again and again. To be sure there was that fourteen thousand dollars that must some day be made good. He had not meant to take it for himself. No man ever does. He had simply intended to profit temporarily by the increased income that that rubber company offered over the bank offer. The bank paid only a beggarly three per cent. while the rubber company had guaranteed twelve. The difference would go to Ives. Certainly he had slipped in that matter, but any man is liable to slip once.

It is the second slip that is the test, he thought. It is the second slip that shows that that man has deliberately chosen to walk on slippery ground. But Nathan Ives would not acknowledge even to himself that he was due to make that second slip. He had only thought about the matter. Not really considered it as a possibility. He would yet find some means to make good the fourteen thousand dollars. Two full years must elapse before he could be called upon to answer for his trusteeship and in that time very much could happen.

A sudden shot punctuated his thoughts. The roar and the throb of it flung to and fro in rising and falling echoes up and down the deep gully. He stepped to his window and looked down upon the street. It was as usual. The same seething mass of sordid life eddying and flowing through the open doors of barrooms and gambling hells; all running full blast with crowded rooms. Crowds that were nebulous in the growing dusk moved up and down the narrow gorge. The shriek of a maddened violin like the wail of a cat in pain came from the open door of the Sixty Six saloon and Jim

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Pencil's place stood wide open. Presently a burst of Homeric laughter was borne to him on the night wind. A few minutes later he was aware of a man limping up the slope of the hill; then his door flung open and a man entered.

IVES noted sub-consciously that his visitor was half drunk as was to be expected. Then he saw that coat and sleeves, hands and hat were all covered with raw egg!

The man fell into a chair and began to laugh.

"Just give me the once over will you, doc! A man plugged me in the arm down street. Look!"

He thrust out his left arm for the Doctor's examination and Ives saw where a bullet had bitten deep mid-way between shoulder and elbow.

"Take off your coat and let me have a good look at it."

The man promptly stripped.

"You might give me a drink," he suggested. "I sure need one or my name's not Tom Preston——"

Ives gave a distinct start. Tom Preston of all men to be pitch-forked into his house in this manner when he had been thinking of him in a vague sort of way in connection with Jerry Lane and his mythical lost diggings and the ore that he had shown him. He knew that Tom Preston had been Jerry Lane's partner and that there was bad blood between them. Could Tom Preston know anything of that ore that he had seen in Jerry's possession?

If any man knew about Jerry's business it would probably be Tom Preston himself. If any man could ferret out the truth of the matter it would be Tom Preston. He would be actuated not only by love of gold which is a good spur but by the desire for revenge which cuts deeper and brings more blood.

"Sure I'll give you a drink when I've seen that arm closer." He carefully examined the wounded arm. "It's a simple bullet hole. The bullet has gone on through. The bad liquor that you have drunk is pumping the blood out. It'll do you good. Steady, man! Wait till I bandage it. How'd you get it?"

To his astonishment Tom Preston dropped again into his chair and amid gusts of laughter punctuated by profanity told him of the omelet that he had not made in the stranger's hat. In spite of himself Ives found himself laughing at the account of the angry cow-puncher and the eighty-dollar hat.

"There! You'll be all right now!" He gave a settling touch to the bandage. "Go and sin no more! So you're Tom Preston, hey?"

"You bet I am. Did you ever know me before, doc? Ever hear of me?"

With the ingenuity of the devil Ives answered.

"Oh, I've heard of you. I know Jerry Lane pretty well. I've heard him talk of you. I've heard him cuss you out till all was a blue blaze."

"Who, me? You've heard Jerry Lane cuss me out? Why the darned old crow-bait! He's so crooked that he can't lie straight in bed, and he talks of *me?* Why say, doc——"

And so on!

Ives let him run on in drunken frenzy for a while. Then:

"You made a big mistake, Preston, when you broke with Jerry Lane. You ought to have kept on good terms with him. The old man is right now on the trail of the best thing that this northern country has ever seen if what he has told me is true."

"It probably ain't so. Jerry Lane would make Ananias look like a little boy with a dirty nose——"

"I'm not so sure about that. Did you ever hear of the Blue Bucket Diggings?"

Preston laughed uproarously for a minute; then he steadied himself. The man was suddenly sober.

"Who hasn't heard of them?" he demanded. "Every place has its tale of wealth that was found by accident. They yarn in Texas about the Tesoro del Padre—the forty mule-loads of bullion that a priest buried. New Mexico tells about El Gran Quivira where Coronado buried a lot of gold. Here we talk of the Blue Bucket Diggin's——"

"That's so," assented Ives, "but I happen to have seen some ore samples that came from those diggings. Jerry Lane told me three weeks ago that one of the three people who know about it gave them to him and that he can get a map of the location— He says he can get a map from him——"

"*Him?* From *him?*" Preston burst into

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a relieved laugh. "Him nothin'. I thought he was lyin' an' now I know it. There was only three people who got out of that mess alive. I know who told Jerry the yarn about the map. It was old Ma Clarke who lives up in Murder Gulch. She does the washin' for a lot of the men. She's half crazy all right, but she was one of the survivors of a wagon-train that was shot up by the Sioux back in 'Forty-seven while they was headin' West across the plains. But she's plumb crazy about the matter of the Blue Bucket. So she's stringin' old Jerry, is she?"

"If she is stringing him, why is she so anxious to have him go out there and locate the place and split the profits with her? And why does she insist that he goes alone?"

Preston suddenly sat up.

"Now you're talkin' turkey," he said soberly. "Did she make that offer? Do you know her?"

"Of course I know Ma Clarke," said Ives heatedly. "That is I know her the same way I know every one else here in Deadwood. I know her when I see her. Old Jerry sure did fool me, Preston. He kept talkin' about a *man* who told him about the matter and *a man* who had the map."

"Aye. That's Jerry. He's an awful liar. Look at what he told you about me."

"He has written for his nephew to come up here to help him," went on Ives. "He has a form of heart trouble that is liable to take him off at any time. He's a sick man. Too sick to go off into the hills by himself, so he has sent for this nephew to come up here to help him. When Jerry once learns the exact location of the Blue Bucket diggings from old Ma Clarke, they'll hog the whole thing for themselves and never let any one else have a look-in—if it is true."

"Oh, I reckon it's true enough," said Preston uneasily. "There's no manner of doubt that some one who was with that wagon-train struck some placer diggin's that was most ungodly rich. The only question in my mind is: Was it Ma Clarke or has she heard some one else tell it so often that she believes it? Now that you mention it, though, I remember that I did hear some of the boys laughin' and jokin' about who it is who is grub stakin' old Ma Clarke. It was some one who is buyin' supplies for her at Looney Wilson's store. Very likely it's Jerry. That'd be about his size."

He rose quickly. For all his weight Preston was as light on his feet as a cat.

"SAY, doc. Let's cinch this matter right now. Iron-hook Bates works at Wilson's store in the day time. He tends cases in the faro layout at nights in the Sixty Six saloon. Let's go down there and I'll ask him if Jerry is stakin' the old woman. If he is, that'll cinch it."

"And then—?" Ives closely scrutinized his erstwhile patient who had suddenly sobered.

"Why, if it is so, we'll find some way to cut in ahead of old Jerry and locate those diggings. First come first served is my motto. He nor she don't own the whole darned territory. Why, man, if he gets that map he'll just naturally skin that poor old woman out of all her claims."

"Suppose she hasn't got a real claim—in law," said Ives slowly.

"Then," said Preston slowly, "the Blue Bucket diggings will belong to whoever finds them first and—doc——"

"Yes. Go on, Preston——"

"I don't see, to save my life, why you and I should not be the men to find those diggin's and make our pile. Get me?"

"Keep your mouth shut, then, and stop drinking till we get this thing settled. Red liquor is a good key for lock-jaw."

He took his hat.

"Come with me. We'll go downtown and see if we can't get some information from Bates."

They headed straight for the Sixty Six saloon. The big barroom was crowded with red-shirted miners in varying degrees of drunkenness. Some stood at the long counter, others were trying their luck at the different games of chance about the room; still others were drinking at the small tables that were set in front of the low stage that filled the back of the room before which a "professor" banged out discordant notes from a tiny piano from whose key-board many of the ivories were gone, making it look like the grin of a man who has lost most of his teeth. Tobacco smoke swirled in wreaths and eddies through the room and the place reeked of tobacco, stale beer, whisky, and the indefinable body scent of two hundred men who had toiled all day and washed not at all.

The two men thrust their way to the bar, and Preston demanded drinks.

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"Joe, where's Iron-hook?" he whispered to the bar-tender.

"He's out in the corridor back of the stage with Calamity Jane. They're havin' some trouble with a new girl that Calamity got to come up here to sling drinks."

"What kind of trouble?" asked Ives lazily.

"She thought she was too darned good to serve drinks. I reckon Iron-hook and Calamity will soon tame her. Listen to that will you——"

A sudden scream from the hall behind the stage cut through the noises of the room as a knife cuts through cloth. Men stood and stared uncertainly at each other, their drinks poised and waiting; yet screams were no novelty in that room. A second scream rang out; then the light deal door at the back of the room burst quickly open and the long corridor was in plain view.

In the very center of the doorway stood a girl. She was dressed in the flimsiest of white dresses that barely reached to her knees exposing arms and shoulders with more than a hint of bust. Her face was flushed with shame and anger, and her eyes sparkled beneath the mass of brown hair that threatened every moment to cascade upon her bare shoulders.

Behind her, Calamity Jane stood blocking the door-way, and beside her, blocking the entire door, a short, dark, squat man with an evil leer upon his face filled the square of the entrance. He was laughing broadly at the girl's plight.

"She's in, all right, Jane. Let's herd her up the middle of the room. Here! Bull!"

There was a rattling scurry as of feet on a tin roof along the floor of the corridor and the next moment a vicious looking bulldog pressed his head against the man's knee.

"Herd her up the room, Bull! Take her, dog!"

The great dog made a quick rush at the girl and snapped at her leg. It was too much for her tautened nerves. She shrank back with a startled cry, the door banged shut behind her and Calamity Jane calmly placed her back against it.

"I told you that you'd come in here in them clothes all right. Now you go ahead an' take your orders for your drinks or you'll hear from me——"

"An' do it darned quick, too—" added the man. He stepped forward and extended toward her, not a hand, but an arm that terminated in a long, rusty, iron hook that was as sharp as a grapnel.

That hook never touched the girl's bare shoulder. She had staggered and fallen against the rough staging away from Iron-hook and even as she staggered a figure sprang from the end of the bar and before any one could speak, Ralph Keene drove his fist home in the very center of Iron-hook's face.

The man went down as though struck by an avalanche and a sudden wave of angry men swept over the pair. Ralph felt himself being picked up time and again by the very pressure of men's bodies though no hand touched him; then he was swept back and fell again and men stamped over him. A sudden haze enveloped him. Oaths crackled to and fro and once a shot rang out.

Then he felt himself being seized and dragged back—and back. The door flung quickly open and he found that he was falling into the street and that Peter Boyce's arm was about him. In his other hand the old man held his heavy Navy sixgun from the muzzle of which a delicate wreath of white smoke swirled up into the cold night air. As the door slammed shut behind them, Ralph heard the frenzied voice of Tom Preston call out:

"Good Lord, Doc! It's my daughter, Mary——"

CHAPTER VI

"WHAT happened, Pete?"

Ralph wrenched himself loose and repeated his question. The old frontiersman chuckled a little as he answered.

"Oh, I seen the startin' of a good-sized ruckus and I made up my mind that it was time for me to horn in before some outsider spoiled it. You started it when you slapped the face of that 'ere man they call Iron-hook. As long as it stood one to one I stayed out, but when the whole herd took to millin' around, I took a hand."

"Was any one hurt?"

"Nothin' to speak of. I wasn't aimin' to do any killin'. I plugged Iron-hook though. I shot him in his yaller pine arm an' I bet it jarred his teeth loose."

"How do you know? Did you see where you hit?"

"How do I know?" Peter Boyce's eyes registered astonishment. "Did I see? Son, I don't have to see to know where I hit.

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I hit where I aim. I've beat Wild Bill hisself with a sixgun."

"The devil you have——"

"Wild Bill will tell you the same thing."

"But, Pete," Ralph looked at the old man incredulously, "Wild Bill shot six shots into a telegraph pole while he rode past it at a gallop and the six shots could be covered by a man's hand?"

"Son," said Mr. Boyce with an air of extreme conviction, "I'm the man what caused the big scare in the St. Louis stock market last year. There was an awful ruckus about it, and I done it by accident. You see they were sendin' a long telegram over the wires givin' the state of the wheat crops. I heard it clickin' away and I cut loose at the wires. You may not believe it but when that telegram got to St. Louis I had shot all the periods out of it and nobody could make any sense out of it. It was so tattered and torn up that the stock market went to pieces."

Ralph subsided.

They found their way to their bedroom while the street was still seething with the rough untamed life of the camp, but their night was not yet over.

It was barely midnight, and the riotous disorder showed no signs of abatement. Ralph had known Cherry Creek and the Colorado gold fields but there they had reached a stage of development wherein the miners had framed at least rudimentary laws for mutual protection. Here there were none and the law of the strong hand was literally the only law that was observed. How could there be any law in a place where Indian war-parties perched on the Ridge above the town and picked off men in the main street?

A loud banging at the door that threatened to beat in the panels at last attracted their attention, bringing Ralph to his feet and sending Peter Boyce to his holster.

"Keep to the left of the door," he muttered. "They might shoot you through it. It's only half inch stuff. All men are dangerous till you bury 'em. Who is it?" he hailed as he flattened himself against the wall by the door. A rough voice answered him.

"Are you the men who came in with Weaver with the stage from the south?"

"Suppose we are. What then?" was the noncommittal answer.

"Then maybe you can give me some news, if you've heard any, of a young fellow named Keene."

"What of him?" demanded Ralph sharply.

"I'm lookin' for him. That's all. My name is Lane—Jeremiah Lane. Young Keene's my nephew. I wrote him to come up here to join me. Dave Weaver the stage driver told me that two men came in with him. He said the Cheyenne war-parties are out and I want to find out about it."

"Come in, Uncle Jerry—" Ralph flung the door open and held out his hand. "I'm Ralph Keene."

The old man strode into the center of the room and looked with keen appreciation at the tall figure of his nephew. When he had completed his deliberate examination he thrust out a big hand and grinned a welcome. Then he saw Peter Boyce.

"Hello, Boyce! Do you remember me? I know you all right. I saw you last down on Snake River. Let me sit down a bit. I'm not goin' to stay more than a minute. Well, boy, how are all the people back East? I had a letter from your mother a matter of three months ago telling me that you were in Denver. Tell me the news."

"While he is tellin' you," quoth Mr. Boyce, "I'll be gettin' a little bottle from the bar. What say, Ralph?"

Ralph nodded and the old prospector tramped his way down the passage.

"I've only got a few minutes," said Jerry as Pete came back with bottle and glasses. "Of course you all will move up to my house in the morning."

"Sure thing. I'll be up to see you the first thing in the morning," said Ralph.

"All right. My house is the last on the western side of the gulch." He strode off down the corridor and the partners turned in for what was left of the night.

EVEN then their sleep was not undisturbed. Twice they were aroused by shots and once a drunken man stumbled against their door in a vain effort to find his own room.

"Pete—" Ralph shot the question to his friend as they were dressing—"what was your aim in coming up here?"

"Well—let's see—I kind of thought that I'd either take up a claim or buy one if I got a bargain and try my luck. There's no hurry. What do you say to goin' partners with me, son?"

"Good! I was hoping you'd suggest

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something like that. I've got a few hundred dollars that we can use. Let's look around for a day or two and see if we can find an opening."

"You'll have no trouble in findin' an openin' for a few hundred dollars," said Peter Boyce grimly. "You'd better wait though till you find out what your uncle has to say to you. He'll have an offer to make or I miss my guess. He's so anxious to see you that I'll bet he wants you to do somethin' for him."

"Not for me," said Ralph hastily. "When I go to the old man I want him to know that I'm standin' on my own feet. All right then! We're partners. Wasn't last night a corker?"

"A pleasant evenin' was had by all," agreed Mr. Boyce pleasantly. "I gathered that the outlaw who busted the eggs in the stranger's sombrero was Tom Preston."

"Yes, and his daughter is the pretty girl who came up on the stage with us. The girl we saw last night in the dance hall. It rather makes you sick to think of, don't it? He must be a bird to let his daughter foregather with a crew like that."

Ralph's teeth clicked viciously as he recalled what had taken place in that dance-hall.

"I won't forget that man Iron-hook Bates—" he said decisively.

"There's no harm in that. He won't forget you either." Mr. Boyce grinned. "You knocked him all lop-sided. I put my mark on him, too, but," his voice grew serious—"a man like that man Bates never forgives the man who fixes him the way you did. You keep your holster untied. I don't say shoot on sight but I do say keep your eyes open for trouble from him. And don't be too darned deliberate about shootin'. Goin'?"

Ralph had risen.

"Yes. I'll meet you here at noon."

The one long street presented by daylight an appearance that belied its riotous disorder of the night before. Perhaps a dozen horses were tied to the hitching-racks in front of the saloons. Few men were in evidence and those few were evidently men who had either made their "pile" and awaited an opportunity to spend it or those who had not yet begun to work.

Ralph walked quickly up the gully and finally climbed the western slope toward the last house. Jerry Lane met him at the door. He had watched him as he came up the hill and he noted with approval the air of confidence and self-control that marked him.

"He'll do. I'm thinkin' he'll be pretty good material for what I want," he soliloquized. "Come on in the house," he hailed. "You and I are about due for a business talk, Ralph."

Ralph entered. The old man produced the ever-ready bottle, filled the glasses and tilted his drink toward his nephew.

"To our better acquaintance."

They drank and sat eyeing each other. Presently Ralph smiled and Jerry grinned in answer.

"Now—" the old man leaned forward in his seat. "Let's get down to cases. You'll be wonderin' why I sent for you. Let me put the whole thing plainly before you. I've done a bit of wanderin' around this western country and some people will say I have made my pile. I have made a little but not near as much as I will make if you will only back me up in this play. It will be my last. I have piled up about forty-five thousand dollars and I've got a good chance to double that. That's why I needed you. I'll tell you——"

Very succinctly but with careful attention to details so that nothing should be missed, he told the wondering youngster all that he had heard and learned about the lost placer workings of the Blue Bucket.

"To prove what I say I'll show you now what I have never showed to but one man, Doctor Ives," he said finally. He went to the closet, brought back the skin sack, poured the contents out upon the table and sat down. Ralph leaned forward and fingered the ore thoughtfully for a minute.

"From what you say, Uncle Jerry, I think it was probably just a pocket that they stripped when they filled the two buckets. Don't you think so?"

"You're probably right. Gold is where you find it. But it certainly is not likely that in all that land there was just two buckets full of ore. No. No. The whole stream bed must be underlaid with pockets and riffles in the bed rock. I'm satisfied that it'll be there all right. Now let me tell you the rest of it——"

Briefly but pointedly he told how his health had failed and how the sudden attacks of killing pain had alarmed him till he had settled the question once and for

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all by getting a professional opinion from Doctor Ives.

"HE SAID it is angina pectoris. He says that an attack may come on at any time and that any attack may be fatal. It may follow any unusual exertion or excitement. He gave me these—" he flipped a small medicine bottle of yellow glass on to the table—" 'nitrate of amyl pearls' he called them. It's plain ——, boy, to follow a thing for years and then when you have it in your hands to have to stop midway to success."

"The Spaniards say, 'Heaven sends nuts to those who have no teeth,'" said Ralph sympathetically. He felt his heart warming to this old man of his blood who was suffering such a disappointment.

"Yes. That's so. Now, Ralph, I can't go into the hills to locate that place. I have sent for you to make you an offer. I have not yet told you that I have made my will. Well, I have, and I have put you down as my heir. You'll get all that I have and more, too, if you will only do as I say. The Blue Bucket will make our fortunes and it will prove that I have been right in my guess. Will you go and find it for me if I get you the map?"

Ralph hesitated.

"But Uncle Jerry," he protested. "I have got my own way to make. I can't afford to go wandering all over the west on a wild goose chase. This talk of the lost Blue Bucket is all chimerical. I've got to earn money up here."

"Earn mine then. I'll stake you if you'll go for me and I'll do more than that, I tell you——"

His earnestness was contagious. The search for those lost diggings was the very breath of his nostrils.

"But, Peter Boyce, my partner?"

The old man demurred for a moment.

"Let me think that over, Ralph. I don't like to have a stranger in on a deal of this size. You let me think it over for a little while. In the meantime you'd better move your belongings up here. You'll have to pay a fortune for a place to live and I have all kinds of room for all of us, since Boyce is your partner. What do you think of Deadwood?"

Ralph told him what he thought of Deadwood and he also told him with great particularity of the events of the previous evening and of the fracas in the gambling hall. The old man listened intently, becoming more and more excited.

"So the girl was the daughter of Tom Preston was she? Well—I don't know her and I don't want to know her. You don't have to get small-pox to make you keep away from those who have it. I know her father and knowin' him I reckon I know the whole Preston tribe. A crookeder——" and the old man was off at score.

"And she's probably no better than she ought to be. If she came up here with a crowd of girls to work in a dance hall it shows that she's the dance hall kind——"

Ralph flushed. He held no brief for Mary Preston but he could not endure that any one should speak lightly of her. Heedless of the patent danger signals in his face, Jerry Lane went on:

"She said she came up here to look for her father, hey? Well—all I've got to say is that she knew darned well where to look. She could have found better men in a jail down south. I don't believe it. She came because it was in her blood and it had to come out. She knew it was easier to make a livin' workin' in a dance hall than it is to work for it honestly. If you want to have any dealin's with me, you steer clear of that Preston gang."

"But, Uncle Jerry——"

"But nothing! That's my last word——"

Ralph became cooler as his uncle became more excited.

"You seem to forget, Uncle Jerry, that it was you who wrote for me. I didn't want to see you especially," he said with brutal frankness. "I don't need you at all and you are asking me to do you a favor."

"Aye! I suppose you think it is doing me a great favor to let me put you down in my will for forty-five thousand dollars and tell you where there is an absolutely sure location that will make us both rich. A—— of a favor you'll be doing me! You think it over, boy! Think it over! All I ask is that you steer clear of that Preston gang. If you do, I'll make your fortune—what's that?"

It was a long shout from the main street and it was followed by a scattering volley of shots. Then came more shouts and yells and another volley of shots.

Both men dashed out upon the steps in time to see every saloon vomiting forth its crowd of men that promptly formed into

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a semi-sober line weaving in and out among the saloons like the tail of a kite whipping loose among a nest of chimneys.

"Let's go and see what is the matter. We can finish our fight later." Ralph grinned.

They reached the main street just in time to join the rear of the long procession as the head of it turned in to a big saloon.

"What's up?" demanded Jerry of a man who was vainly trying to claw his way over his head and shoulders.

"They've brung in the head of the first Injun killed in the diggin's. Two greasers killed a Sioux brave out on the Crook City trail and have brung his head in for the reward. Look! There's the head——"

As though it had been divided with a knife the crowd separated leaving a clear lane to the bar whereon some one had placed the newly severed head on view. The upper half of the face was dotted with black and white paint spots about the size of a half dollar and the lower half was painted a bright vermilion.

The bedraggled scalp-lock by which the slayer had carried the newly acquired head, hung down over the left ear. The killer, a Mexican, stood close to it with the air of proud accomplishment that one might wear who has stalked a cimarron across snow-laden ranges for a lucky kill. Yet that Mexican had simply stumbled over a sleeping warrior and had killed him in his sleep.

A sudden shout drew the attention of all men to the door through which Calamity Jane dashed. She was more than half drunk and her companion, Black Jack McAlleer, was haranguing the crowd as the pair pushed their way up to the bar. Iron-hook Bates trailed along behind them. He too showed the effects of all night drinking.

"Come on you people! Set 'em up, Aleck!"

Aleck "set 'em up," while Calamity Jane leaned over and held her glass to the painted lips that seemed to grin in derision of the life of the boasted White Man.

"Here's to you, old man? You done your —— while you was livin'. Hey! Black Jack! What's the matter with hoistin' that head to the top of the flag-pole so everybody can see it."

The roar of approval that followed this set the crowd crazy. Iron-hook swung his hat and yelled and the swinging hat knocked Ralph's sombrero from his head. For a brief second Iron-hook stared at him unseeingly. Then he recognized in Ralph the man who had knocked him down the night before. He uttered a roar and rushed at him.

RALPH could not get away; the crowd was too closely bunched around him. To shoot in that jam meant to hurt, perhaps to kill, an innocent bystander, for the heavy bullet would drive through three men at close range. Before his thoughts could take form there came a gruesome diversion. There was a sudden crash and a quick roar of laughter from the crowd as Peter Boyce, standing by the end of the bar, seized the dead head and drove it like a bowling ball straight at Iron-hook's head.

He went down carrying two men along with him and the drunken crew sweeping over him carried the hideous trophy out into the open. Iron-hook found himself upon his feet staring open-mouthed into the muzzle of Ralph's pistol while Calamity Jane glowered at them both from one side. She carried two pistols, but she made no attempt to draw either.

"Say, Iron-hook," she remarked in a caustic aside. "This here's the second time this man has busted your play. Last night with the girl and now——"

Ralph interrupted her.

"Unbuckle your belt," he commanded. "Unbuckle it and drop it where you stand. Quick or I'll shoot."

His tone carried with it complete conviction. Iron-hook Bates quickly did as he was bidden."

"Now go! Vamose! Get out! The next time that you start trouble with me, I'll be ready and I'll shoot first. Get me? Pete——"

For Peter Boyce was clawing at his arm.

When the crowd had filtered up the street intent in its gruesome pleasantry, Ralph turned to find his uncle, but he was nowhere to be seen. He felt a light hand on his arm and saw Mary Preston standing on his other side.

"I must see you for a moment," she said breathlessly. "It is important. Walk down the street and turn in at the O. K. restaurant. I want to have a few words with you."

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CHAPTER VII

THE O. K. restaurant into which Ralph turned was distinguished from its neighbors by the fact that it supplied privacy of a sort for its patrons. The space behind the barroom was separated into a half dozen little cubicles each of which held a table and four chairs and was partitioned from the main room by a calico curtain. That in which Ralph seated himself boasted also a dirty table cloth on which a fairly accurate map of Polynesia and Australasia was set forth in egg yolks and coffee stains.

No sooner had he seated himself than the curtain again drew aside and Mary Preston slipped into the chair opposite him. Her eyes were bright with excitement and her cheeks were flushed as though from running.

"I mustn't be seen talking to you," she began breathlessly. "If they knew I had warned you there might be trouble. They would never forget it."

"They? Who? What do you mean, Miss Preston?" demanded Ralph.

She interrupted him.

"Do you know that I have found my father?" she asked quickly. "After you had helped me last night, my father came, and then—well, then all was well. At least it was as well as it can be in this horrible place. You can never guess what you did for me last night, Mr. Keene——"

"I wish I had done for that man Bates," grunted Ralph.

"It was not so much his fault as it was the fault of that awful creature they call Calamity Jane. She was the one who got me to come up here on the strength of a lying offer. She sent Weaver to bring girls up here to the dance halls, but she got us to sign a contract saying that we were to come as waitresses——"

"I know. That is a common game with them."

"They lied, of course. I should have suspected something but I was so anxious to get in touch with my father whom I had not seen for more than a year that I did not take as much care as I should have. However, all is well now that I have found my father——"

Remembering his uncle's opinion of Mr. Preston, and what he himself had seen of that gentleman, Ralph was discreetly silent.

"After all the disturbance was quieted last night he took me to a place where he got me a room. It is not much of a place, to be sure, but it is clean and it is quiet, and that is more than can be said of many places up here. I am living with the funniest old woman you ever saw in your life—a Mrs. Clarke. She looks almost a hundred years old and she dips snuff. But that isn't what I wanted to tell you.

"I want to put you on your guard against that man Bates. Last night after you had gone I heard them talking in the corridor. Bates was carrying on fearfully about your having struck him, and my father and a man they called Ives were trying to quiet him."

"I have already seen Bates, Miss Preston," said Ralph quietly. "He and I had a sort of an interview and I think we understand each other now. Tell me of yourself."

Mary shuddered a little at the recollection of the events of the night before.

"Finding my father has settled all my troubles," she said loyally. "But I fear——"

"What?" Ralph leaned toward her. "What is it that you fear, Miss Preston?"

"Oh," she burst forth: "I don't like the men he is associating with. I know mining camps are rough. I have no illusions about them. I have seen them before but none was ever quite as bad as this place. That man Bates has some sort of a hold on my father. I hate him. I hate the creature they call Calamity Jane. After you had left last night I heard them talking in the hall—How can you stand her?"

"I can't and don't," said Ralph frankly.

"I am not even absolutely sure of this place that my father found for me at Mrs. Clarke's," burst forth poor Mary. "After he had taken me there last night and we had got the poor old woman out of bed, another man came along long after midnight and insisted on talking with Mrs. Clarke. He was an old man and he was very violent——"

"Do you mean that he followed you there?" asked Ralph indignantly.

"Oh, no! My father took me there and then went home to his own room. A little later a man pounded at the door. Old Mrs. Clarke called out, 'Who's there'? All that I heard was a voice that shouted out—the old woman is quite deaf—'It's Jerry Lane, Ma. I must see you for just a minute. The boy has come.'"

Ralph sat up, suddenly interested.

"Say that again," he demanded.

Mary said it again.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

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"I don't quite understand," he said, frankly puzzled. "But Jerry Lane is my uncle. I came in yesterday from the south in answer to a letter from him. It appears that I am the 'boy' he spoke to Mrs. Clarke of, but I don't understand how she is mixed up in my affairs."

"Then this morning I met my father and told him of the incident of last night and he asked me three or four times if I was sure that I had heard the man's name correctly. He said something about a man who was trying to 'put something over' on a poor old woman. Could he have meant your uncle?"

"Heaven knows. I don't believe your father and my uncle are very fond of each other," he said whimsically.

Mary rose.

"I must be going now. I am going to meet my father for dinner. Be sure you keep a sharp watch for that man Bates."

"Let me walk with you. It does not matter if they see you with me now that you have told me."

"If you wish to, then. Come on— Oh, look there!"

INTENSE disgust was written on her face as she pointed to the still surging, yelling crowd a quarter of a mile up the cañon. They had tied a rope to the poor dead head, fastening it to the scalplock, and had hoisted it to the top of a tall flagpole about which they were grouped cheering and shouting in drunken abandon.

"You might think they had licked the whole Sioux nation instead of waylaying one poor devil of a warrior," growled Ralph. "Where is your home, Miss Preston?"

"Up there!" Mary pointed to a small green-painted house that clung as by a miracle to the hill-side as an eyebrow clings to a man's face. Above it the great pines were massed in serried ranks of blackness, and beyond the pine forest broad patches of white snow gleamed and shone in the morning sunlight. "There is old Mrs. Clarke now——"

She pointed to an old woman who had come out of the house and who was trying to split a board into kindling wood. In a second Ralph sprang over the low fence, took the ax from the old woman's hands, and with a half dozen blows split the board into tiny pieces. She peered up at him for a moment without speaking, then she nodded her thanks as Mary joined them.

"You thank him fer me, dearie," she wheezed. "I'm so deef that he couldn't hear me."

Ralph chuckled softly and waited.

"What's his name, dearie?"

Mary Preston shrieked her answer into the deaf ears.

"Mr. Keene! He is Mr. Lane's nephew!— Do you hear me?"

"Aye! I'm not so deef but what I can hear sometimes—when you talk like that—" She looked Ralph over critically from head to foot. "So you're the boy that old Jerry Lane wrote fer out o' Denver, hey?"

Ralph nodded again.

"Hm! You seem to be a right well-growed slip of a boy. Come in the house."

They followed her inside the house and stood watching her in some surprize as she went to a small corner closet from which she took a handful of small objects, and, bringing them back to the table with her, sat down in a capacious old rocking-chair.

"Set a spell," she bade them briefly. "I told Jerry Lane that I'd send him some things today that he's been after fer quite a spell. You'd better take it to Jerry fer me. He's the only man here in these diggin's that I'd trust with a plugged copper cent an' that ain't sayin' much. I've knowed Jerry fer twenty years. Here an' elsewhere.

"So you're the boy that Jerry Lane is goin' to have work fer him, eh?" She scrutinized Ralph again from head to foot— "You look to me like you'll do. You look as hard as a cast-iron dog, but the Lord knows you'll need to be! You'll have a hard job to travel even in 'Seventy-six where we all traveled in 'Forty-seven—" She cackled in the senile laughter of old age.

"I was forty-six years old when we all left the North Platte. No chicken! You're thinkin'. Well, I wasn't! Chickens didn't travel across the plains in them days. There was two wagons of us— You softies couldn't live through what we got fat on— I done it! Me with two grand-children at forty-six an' both of 'em with the wagons. It's easy travelin' on the trail now. I've seen 'em with six an' eight mules hitched to a wagon and the drivers ridin' on the lazy-boards! Doin' that in 'Forty-seven would have meant Injun arrers an' a ring attack before the men could have got to their rifles. ——! What haven't I seen?

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"A ring of fire around us and both wagons set on fire by their fire arrers— Red devils ridin' through the smoke— Jake Duston pinned to the jockey-box with an arrer through his throat, Luke Masterson lyin' under the wagon restin' his rifle on the wheel spokes with me shovin' new loaded guns to him as fast as I could load 'em——"

She rocked to and fro with her apron pulled over her head.

"Poor thing," Mary whispered. "She's living over again that attack on the wagon train that I have heard people talk about. She crossed the plains, you know."

Ralph's eyes gleamed as he looked long at the frail body of the little old woman.

" 'And there were giants in those days,' " he quoted softly.

"And smoke and yells and a painted devil ridin' out of the smoke who pulled Lucy from the wagon box— Ah! The smash when the stone ax went home— An' then when I come to there was just smoke, smoke, smoke— An' now I'm here, old an' worn out and waitin' for a man with nerve enough to go and get what we left behind us while they lie out there on the cold prairie where we left 'em——"

Silence fell for a little space, broken only by the creaking of the rocking-chair and by a faint sniffling from the old woman. Presently she shook herself into life, fumbled among the articles that lay in her lap and tossed to the astonished Ralph a long, gray woolen stocking.

YOU take that to Jerry Lane fer me," she said still sniffling. "Tell him that Lucy Clarke says that he's to take it an' work by it and to play fair with her in what he finds. He's been after it fer more'n a year and he's the only man I would trust with it. See that it don't git into any hands but Jerry Lane's. He was here last night talkin' a leg offen me to git that map but even then I couldn't make up my mind to let it go. You take it to him now." She rose and by sheer strength pulled him to his feet. "You tell Jerry that I say to git started. I say git started! Work quick. Others are after the same thing and there were two others with that train who got away. Others are after them diggin's and where many seek many finds. Understand?"

"I'm darned if I do," muttered the astonished Ralph. "Tell her 'yes' for me," he whispered to Mary who promptly shrieked his answer into the old woman's ears. She gave a quick nod of comprehension.

"Off you go then. Pull your freight!" She pushed Ralph toward the door. "I don't want to live any longer dependin' even on Jerry Lane fer samp and bacon when I've got a fortune wrapped up in that gray woollen stockin' that I gave you. It's up to you an' Jerry Lane to git it fer me. I'm gettin' old, dearie——"

"Can I see you again?" Ralph flung the question over his shoulder as Mary opened the door for him. "Now that I know where you live can I not come up to see you?"

"Of course. I'll be glad to see you any evening. Remember what I told you about that Bates man. Good-by."

She watched him as he turned down the crooked trail that led to the street below. When he had swung around the last big boulder she turned away with a sigh and so missed what took place below her.

Ralph plowed his way down among the loose shale and the rocks, stopped at the bottom of the slope to roll a cigaret and finally with a lighted match flaming in the cup of his sheltering hands stepped into the main trail to face—his uncle and Doctor Ives. That they had been watching him was very evident.

"So—" The old man burst into unconsidered speech regardless of Ives' restraining hand on his arm. "So you've got no more regard for what I tell you and for what I want than if I had never spoken. Oh, I saw you! I watched you from the first time that that girl looked at you. She knows how to play a sucker! It wasn't for nothin' that her father got her a room with old Ma Clarke! They've sure got the habit of doin' crooked things in the Preston family, I tell you. Don't you suppose I know why Tom Preston put his girl to live with old Ma Clarke?"

"Quiet, Jerry! Quiet! There's no need to tell your business to the whole world," cautioned Ives.

"You shut up, Nathan! I'll tell my own nephew what I think of him if I choose. I send for him to come up here to do a delicate piece of work for me and to make his own fortune as well and here he is stickin' around the first good-lookin' piece of calico that a crooked thief like Tom Preston turns loose on him. A bletherin', lop-eared fool if you

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ask me! Runnin' sideways to the swish of the first petticoat he hears in a Deadwood dance hall and me looking to him to do a man's work——"

"You need look no further," Ralph burst forth furiously. "I'm done with you and your sneaking, spying ways. Blood is blood, but water is water and I tell you that I'm done with you. You can leave your money to whoever you darned well please. I don't want it——"

He turned away in wrath; then remembering the article that Mrs. Clarke had given him for his uncle, he pulled the woollen stocking from his pocket and flung it at the feet of the surprized old prospector.

"Take that and keep clear of me in the future," he growled as he turned away.

"Goin' to her again I suppose," jeered the old man. He could not resist that last fling as his nephew turned away. He felt sure that that last word would rankle and he meant that it should. "It's too bad she lives so far up on the hill. Why don't you tell Calamity Jane to round up her girls and keep 'em closer to home?"

In two jumps Ralph was back at the old man's side standing over him as a big dog stands over a rabbit before he pounces upon it.

"You— You—" No more words would come.

The old man's wrath flamed into speech. He had counted surely on aid from Ralph in carrying to completion the desire of his life and now that aid would be withheld. Curt crisp words that were poisoned arrows of the tongue fought for liberation. In the midst of it all, while his pent-up rage still fought for utterance, he staggered a little, rocked to and fro on heels and toes and then toppled over to be caught by the ready hands of Nathan Ives.

"Quick, man!" he called to Ralph. "Quick, I say! Give me a hand here— Hold his head——"

All his quick-born wrath forgotten, Ralph laid his uncle's body very gently down upon the soft earth at the side of the trail and watched nervously as Ives felt in pocket after pocket of Jerry Lane's coat.

"Ah! Here it is! I have it—" He pulled a small medicine bottle from a side pocket. "Give me your handkerchief, Keene. Now watch, Keene——"

Ralph saw him take from the bottle a small yellowish capsule; he saw him place it in a corner of the handkerchief. Then he squeezed it till the capsule burst and very quickly thrust it under the nostrils of the unconscious Jerry Lane. A strong smell smote both men.

"Nitrate of amyl," said Ives, nodding sharply. "It is the only thing that affords relief in these attacks. It is angina pectoris that he has, you know. You've got to look out for him, Keene. You can't help yourself. You're his blood kin and must do it. Blood is thicker than water. He may die in any one of these attacks and any excitement is liable to bring on a recurrence of the seizure. Avoid exciting topics with him and now help me to get him home. He is conscious now."

Jerry Lane was feebly scrambling to his feet in a shamefaced way and was brushing the dust from his clothing. He saw the gray stocking lying by him, thrust it in his pocket and slowly straightened up.

"We can talk over our affairs later, Ralph," he said briefly, as though the words hurt him. But Ralph's ready arm was around him and the young shoulder very readily took the weight of the old man as they went slowly up the hill followed by Doctor Ives. When they reached the cabin, Ives helped Ralph get Jerry to bed and then he turned to the younger man, with an enigmatical expression lurking in his eyes.

"Come over to my house as soon as you can do so, Keene," he said shortly. "That was the last nitrate of amyl pearl that Jerry had left. You must be very careful to always keep a supply of them on hand for use in these attacks. I have some on hand and I have written for a large supply. You must never be without them.

"Thanks, doctor, I will come over at once. Just as soon as I get things straightened out a little and make the old man more comfortable."

The door of the cabin slammed and Doctor Nathan Ives went jubilantly on his way.

During that brief fifteen minutes of Jerry Lane's attack a sudden plan had suggested itself to him and he was morally certain that it could not fail.

"Come over as soon as you can," he called over his shoulder. "Jerry must not be without his remedy. I will wait at the house for you."

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CHAPTER VIII

THERE were four rooms in Doctor Ives' house. The front door opened directly into a sitting room. Behind this lay the kitchen from which the garbage could be emptied directly down hill upon the roof of a neighbor's house. Whether the garbage was actually thus thrown depended upon the nature of the relations existing between the families. The room to the right of the sitting-room was Ives' bedroom; that on the left had been turned into a combination office and dispensary.

This had been rendered necessary because there was no drug store as yet in Deadwood. Most of the miners who were injured preferred the old fashioned remedies of whisky and cob-webs; whisky to restore circulation and cob-webs to stanch it. For the benefit of those who had graduated from this antiquated method of treatment Ives brought some drugs in from Denver and filled his own prescriptions in the little dispensary. The well-filled shelves always attracted the curious patient who might be wandering about the office while Ives put up the prescription, and who vainly strove to translate the Latin inscriptions on the bottles.

"What fer language is them written in, doc?" inquired one man pointing to the *olium ricini* bottle while Ives wrestled with a refractory bandage.

"Greek——"

"I thought it was Latin——"

"Greek—pure Greek. If you don't believe me ask any one down-town and if it isn't pure Greek to any body in the diggings I'll eat my shirt."

On this occasion Ives felt certain that he would have at least a half-hour before Ralph Keene would be able to leave his uncle to come to the dispensary for more of the amyl capsules. He poured himself a generous drink and threw himself into an easy chair to think out the details of the plan that had taken form in his mind. Till now it had been purely nebulous; a mere suggestion that was born of the wish for the money that Jerry Lane had and that Ralph Keene certainly did not need. There were three salient features in the plan that suddenly occurred to him:

1st: He needed the forty-five thousand dollars.

2nd: To get it it would be necessary to remove both Jerry Lane and Ralph Keene.

3rd: If it were done at all it must be done in such a way that no question of his connection with the matter could ever arise.

If he had thought the matter over for a century he could never have evolved a simpler plan than the one that came to him. It was perfectly simple. So simple in fact that he felt like cursing his own stupidity for not having thought of it before.

His drink consumed, he spent some time in the dispensary and while he was still there, busily engaged in compounding a prescription for a man who had been dead for two days, so intent was Ives on his own private labors, there came a knocking at the door that threatened to beat it off its hinges.

"Come in," he shouted. Then he saw that it was Ralph Keene. "Oh—it's you already, is it, Keene? Come in! I'll be through here in a second and then I will be able to attend to you."

"All right. Go ahead. I'll watch you——"

Ives worked on. Presently he turned to his visitor.

"Look here, Keene," he said sharply: "Do you realize how very precarious the condition of your uncle is?"

"Well, yes. I guess I do since you say it is and you're the doctor. Why?"

"He has told me on more than one occasion that it is necessary for him to go off into the hills on a prospecting trip. He is simply obsessed with the idea. Of course it would be suicidal for him to go. You know that. So does he, though he will not acknowledge it. He can't go. There are three darned good reasons for him not to go. To begin with an attack like the one he had today might kill him at any moment. Any extra strain will probably bring on an attack——"

"The other two reasons do not seem to matter much," grinned Ralph, "but you may as well tell me what they are."

"Indians and old age. He simply can not go and he must be made to realize it. Take this bottle—" he handed Ralph a small brown glass bottle— "and fill it with those nitrate of amyl pearls from the big bottle at the end of the shelf. You can't go wrong. My hands are covered with acid—yes. That's it. Take a dozen of them and handle them as carefully as you would handle a new-laid egg. They're very hard to get up here. You saw how I

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used them. Never let them out of your possession and be sure to call me when you think an attack is imminent. Put them in that bottle and be very careful of them."

Ralph took the little bottle, filled it with the pearls of amyl and put it in his coat pocket.

"Do you want to label it?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll have to do that. One can't be too careful of powerful medicines."

He wrote the label, pasted it on the bottle and walked to the door with Ralph.

"Are you going directly home?"

"Yes. I suppose so. I was so darned mad at the old man that I had about made up my mind to sever all connection with him and his pipe dreams, but I can't leave him now. I've got to overlook the fact that he abused me like a pick-pocket. I'll have a talk with my partner. I can't leave the old man in such an emergency."

"You're quite right. I felt sure you'd see it in that light. He depends on you more than you imagine. Come again when you feel like it. I'll always be glad to see you. I've got some whisky that's a lot better than any you'll get down town."

HE STOOD at the window and watched Ralph run down the hill. Then he closed the door and sat down quickly in his big chair his face dripping with sweat and a look in his eyes that had never been in them before. Luck? Assuredly there was such a thing as luck! Sometimes it ran against a man for days and when it did, it could not be compelled, but when it was running in one's favor the only sensible thing to do was to take it at the flood and play it to the limit. He had played roulette often enough to feel sure that one did not win big stakes by playing small bets on many numbers. It was only by watching the run and then by plunging on one bet that any large sums were made. And now he had plunged!

When any work, good or bad, has been completed there comes always a moment of reaction; the moment when the worker waits to see how the completed work really will appear in cooler moments. That moment of reaction is the time of the real test. If the work seems good when the worker is tired out and disheartened, it probably is good. Ives had his doubts over what he had done.

In the beginning he had never intended to commit himself irrevocably to any line of action no matter how badly he wanted that money of Jerry Lane's. He had never intended to do anything that would commit him to any line of action from which he could not instantly retreat but now he had done it. A feeling of distinct coldness at the pit of his stomach suggested physical fear, yet Ives was no coward. He reached for the bottle of superior whisky that he had recommended to Ralph and poured himself a large drink.

"It's an even chance," he muttered. "And no man can ask more than that. It may never come to pass at all. The old man may never have another attack."

When Ralph reached his uncle's cabin he found the old man sitting up in his bed. The light of battle still gleamed in his eyes and he welcomed the youngster as the challenger in a battle welcomes the newcomer in the ring.

"Well—you're back are you? How's she lookin'?"

"Let's cut all that talk out, Uncle Jerry. It'll only stir us both up and it will get us nowhere."

"It won't, hey? It'll get us just where I want to get. Body o' me! A man can say what he chooses to say in his own house surely. Now you listen to me young man. I've got a few plain words to tell you. You may not like what I'm going to say but that makes no difference to me. First of all: Do you want the forty-five thousand dollars that I am able to leave in my will? Or shall it go to some one else? Answer me that first of all. Do you want it?"

"Not especially. I don't want it at all if I've got to put up with all your darned peculiarities and eccentricities to get it. It isn't worth the price."

The reply was to say the least disconcerting. Judging from what he had seen in nearly sixty years of a wandering life beyond the frontier; from what he believed were the mainsprings of men's actions Jerry Lane simply did not believe what Ralph said. He did not realize that to young men the real zest of life lies in the making of money as typifying success and not in the mere fact of possession.

"You don't want it," he gasped. "Then there's no more to be said——"

His breathing had become loud, almost stertorous and the veins in his face and neck had filled with the dark blood that suggested

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congestion. He looked almost apoplectic in his anger.

"Look here, Uncle Jerry," said Ralph coolly. "This is no time for us to quarrel. You have just got over one bad attack and you're still feeling the effects of it. I'm willing to do my best by you, but I've got to do it in my own way. I have got to work to live, for I don't propose to live on you. This scheme of yours to hunt for the lost Blue Bucket diggings is chimerical to say the least, but I will talk the matter over with my partner. I'm going down town now to see him and talk the thing over with him. For goodness' sake keep quiet while I am gone—" and heedless of the cackle of senile wrath that followed him Ralph strode down the hill and into the main street.

He found Peter Boyce in their room where he was patiently awaiting the arrival of his partner.

"I was lookin' and waitin' for you, son. There's —— to pay and no pitch hot——"

"Wait a minute, Pete. Let me talk first——"

"If you've got anything to say that beats what I'm aimin' to tell you it'll sure be goin' some," muttered the old prospector.

"It's about my uncle——"

"I thought the old pirate would be springin' somethin' on you that'd make you sit up and take notice. What ails him?"

"To begin with, I believe he's half crazy——"

"Most men are. The only question of difference is what druv 'em crazy? What is it? Women, whisky or gold in his case?"

"I believe it's a combination of the two last."

"He's a goner, then," muttered Mr. Boyce. "You can't mix any two of them three without raisin' —— with the Constitution and the Flag. Shoot, boy!"

"He has made up his mind to get me to go out to search for those lost Blue Bucket Diggings."

Peter Boyce started to say something but Ralph checked him.

"There seems to be more to it than you would think at first, Pete. He has got hold of a map that was given to him by an old woman—old Mrs. Clarke who lives here in Deadwood. She was one of the three survivors of the wagon-train that was jumped by the Indians. They found those diggings, but all were wiped out but the three people. Mrs. Clarke is one of them. She seems a little bit crazy, but she is clear enough on the important parts of the story."

"IT'S a promisin' kind of prospect," muttered Mr. Boyce. "A crazy woman gives a kind of a map to a half-crazy man and he gets a fool nephew to take his loony partner—'nd that's me——"

"Will you wait?" Ralph grinned genially at him. In a few words he told his partner all that had taken place that morning. The old man listened attentively. When Ralph stopped he said:

"Yep. That's all fine and dandy but what I was aimin' to say when I was interrupted was that after you left me I trailed along with the crowd. It's always good to do that. You kin learn a lot more from a crowd than you kin from one man. I crowded kind o' close to that crowd, especially to that hook-armed friend of yours. Him and Calamity Jane had their heads together most of the time.

"Bates has got it in for you for havin' punched his head an' Calamity Jane blames you for takin' away from her the most promisin' dance-hall girl she's got her hands on since Georgia Dow came up here, and the pair of 'em agrees that Deadwood ain't big enough for you and them too. They've got quite a followin' and they are gettin' that followin' together today. They didn't know that you and me are partners so they was talkin' kind of loose before me. Did you ever ride a rail, Ralph?"

"That's about the one thing I haven't ridden, Pete! Why?"

"They're plannin' to break you in on one tonight. That's all. About moonrise they said they'd be for you. I figure that'll be about eleven o'clock. What say?"

For a moment Ralph said nothing but his chin thrust forward aggressively and his eyes hardened. He drew his heavy pistol from the holster and clicked the cylinder around viciously.

"You keep clear of this mess, Pete. I'll play her as she lays."

"You will, of course, with me for a partner. That's likely ain't it? The only thing that bothers me is that almost every man in these here diggin's will back their play. You see you an' me are strangers and

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strangers, like strange dogs, are always wrong."

"You're sure right there, but tell me this, Pete—did you ever know a crowd to *bury* the wrong man? I'm not going to start anything that I can't finish, but I'm not going to be driven an inch till I choose to go. That pair of crooks can't drive me an inch. Let's go and get some dinner."

They got their dinner and while they were eating it they were conscious always of persistent scrutiny. It seemed that the public had determined that the pair should not get out of sight.

"I forgot to tell you, Ralph, that I closed a deal for a cabin for us to live in. It ain't much of a place, and they ask forty dollars a week for it. If you're aimin' to close matters with your uncle you'd better go and see him right away while I get some grub and pack it up to the house. There may be quite a party up there tonight," he said grimly, "and we want to be prepared for visitors. Our cabin is the second to the left after you pass the Gold Nugget."

"All right. I'll see you later then——"

Ralph walked slowly along the street and up the hill. When he reached his uncle's cabin he found Jerry sitting on the steps in the sun. He had entirely recovered from his seizure and was shouting cheerily across the cañon to Ives who was standing on his porch. The old man's face darkened as Ralph drew near and sat down upon the steps, fanning himself with his hat.

"Well—?" Ralph smiled amiably. "Feelin' better, Old-Timer?"

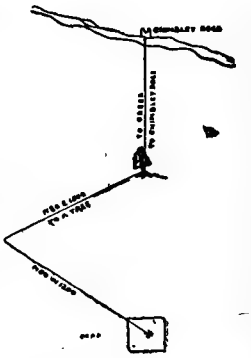
"No thanks to you if I am," growled his uncle. "Come inside the house. I have somethin' to show you."

Ralph followed him inside the cabin and watched while Jerry spread a rough map on the table.

"Here's the map that Ma Clarke sent to me by you. What I propose is this. I'll put it short and sweet: I've made my pile. I've told you about that. I have named you as my heir and if anything should happen to you this money will go to Ives."

"Go on——"

"This is the map that shows the location of the Blue Bucket Diggings that Mrs. Clarke knows about. She and I are to split fifty-fifty on what I get out of it. From her description of the place it can't



be more than three hundred miles from here. Call it twenty days' pony travel. It was north of the Big Horn Mountains in a general sort of way. I don't know what a wagon-train was doing so far north of the Trail but those darned wagon-trains were always wanderin' away from the direct line of travel. You can take your partner with you if you'll go for me."

"Do you mean that you will grub-stake us?"

"Just you two. No more than that. Now there is just one other thing. I am morally certain that Tom Preston has been trying his best to get in ahead of me in the matter of this map and to find out about the place so he can beat me to it. There were two other people besides Mrs. Clarke who know about it. I am certain that Preston has located his daughter up with old Ma Clarke so that she can act as his stool pigeon and find out about the map for him so they can beat us to it—that daughter of his is no good——"

"Why can't you leave her out of this?" demanded Ralph hotly. To save his soul he could not help speaking in defense of Mary Preston.

"Because she has pushed herself into it and it happens to be my business. It's my belief that she knows all about it and that she's hooked up with Preston and Bates and Calamity Jane Dalton and——"

"You make me tired! An old man like you ought to have better sense than to——"

Control of his temper was never one of Jerry Lane's strong points. He sprang to his feet upsetting the table and scattering map and nuggets on the floor.

"YOU—you—" he fairly thrust his fist into Ralph's face as he backed away from the now thoroughly aroused old man.

"You darned tramp," he shouted shrilly. "What good are you anyway? Twenty-seven years old and a hobo trailin' from —— to high water with an old desert rat and two pack-ponies, pickin' up the first skirt you meet with on the Cheyenne trail—"

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even in his anger he seemed to know what would hurt his nephew most and he selected his words with deadly precision. "A girl of that kind! Tom Preston's daughter making herself out paint and powder shy! Why she was brought to Deadwood by Calamity Jane Dalton to work for Swarringer in his dance-hall! I'll bet you right now that she's crackin' a cold bottle with Calamity Jane an' Iron-hook Bates in the back room at Black Jack's laughin' over the way she landed a sucker——"

Ralph sprang to his feet with a hot oath. "If you were not my uncle and an old man at that—I'd—I'd——"

Even Jerry Lane shrank back from the sheeted wrath in the young man's eyes. Then his gorge rose again:

"Get out o' here! You worthless, no-account, triflin'—good for nothing——"

His clenched hands flung skyward in impotent wrath. His face became suffused with dark blood and he reeled uncertainly. Then with a shrill, inarticulate cry he pitched backward and lay face up on the floor.

Ralph sprang forward to aid him, all anger dropping from him as one drops a garment. It was well, he thought, that Ives had shown him exactly what to do in such a case. He quickly loosened tie and shirt, tearing the latter open to the waist. He laid the gray head prone upon the floor and pulled his handkerchief from his pocket with one hand while he searched frenziedly in his coat pocket for the little bottle that contained those life-saving nitrate of amyl pearls that he had got from Doctor Ives.

Ah! There it was! The bottle was nearly filled with the yellowish capsules of glass. He tore the cork out of the bottle with his teeth and emptied several of the ampules into his hand. Even as he placed one in the end of his handkerchief and replaced the bottle in his coat pocket he found himself wondering what would have happened had he not so providentially been present to give immediate relief.

The doors and windows of the house stood wide open, just as Jerry Lane had left them and a very tornado was tearing through the house, whipping papers and clothing to and fro and threatening to tear the very curtains loose from their poles. He seized the twisted end of his handkerchief that contained the "pearl," placed it close to the gray head that was thrashing to and fro on the floor in agony and squeezing hard on the glass bulb—broke the pearl!

In the previous attack relief had come instantly. He was not prepared for what now took place. Jerry Lane's breathing had been loud; almost stertorous. It suddenly ceased. His eyelids flickered once; then his lips set suddenly like the jaws of a trap, into pain lines that as suddenly relaxed.

His whole figure quivered and his heels dug hard into the rough planks of the floor in a spasm of pain that shook the very foundations of the Temple of Life itself as the whole body became tense. Sudden relaxation came and he lay quiet and still with the utter slackness of death upon him; his features set in the fixed grin of those who die a violent death.

Ralph Keene fell back appalled. In the name of Heaven what had happened?

Crunching steps on the gravel outside the house sounded in his ears as loud as Fate itself and the next moment he heard as one hears through a fog, the voice of Doctor Ives, cheery, pleasant.

"I couldn't help hearing the old man raising the —— with you, Keene, so I came over to see if I couldn't help you with him. Where is he? This excitement is very bad for him you know—hello!"

He flung himself upon his knees by the side of the dead body, looked at the gray old face and pulled open the eyelids. Then he felt the heart and felt the pulse and shook his head. Last of all he sniffed at the dead lips and picked up the bottle that Ralph had set on the floor by the body. It was open and as he raised it the "pearls" cascaded out and lay in a little yellow heap under the arm-pit of what had been Jerry Lane.

"Keene! Keene!" Ives drew himself up and looked long and sharply at Ralph. "How could you do it, Keene? How could you do it?"

"Do what?" demanded Ralph, astounded at the form of the inquiry. "How could I do what? What are you talking about?"

"I mean that—" Ives pointed accusingly at the prostrate body. "What else in God's name *could* I mean?" His finger pointed squarely at the body while his eyes held the eyes of Ralph Keene. "I mean that you have killed your uncle. I mean that Jerry Lane is dead because of what you gave him——"

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"You utter fool! I gave him the medicine that you gave me to give him! I gave him the nitrate of amyl pearls that you said would give immediate relief——"

"You are surely crazy, Keene—" Ives' tone was very positive. "You can't get away with a cold-blooded case of poisoning like this. Not even here in Deadwood, an unsettled mining camp. You, a stranger, nephew and heir to the old man. You, who were to inherit his fortune, came to my house to get medicine for the old man who was sick. I was busy and told you to take some nitrate of amyl pearls from a bottle that was on my shelf. You got them and while my back was turned you took advantage of the opportunity to take some stuff from the next bottle. And then after a row with your uncle you gave him the stuff that you had stolen from my dispensary. Well, my friend! What you gave your uncle has killed him. That's all."

"What killed him? What was in the capsules?" demanded Ralph as in a daze.

"As though you do not know," said Ives scornfully. "You held hydrocyanic acid under his nose and he smelled it and he died instantly. It was prussic acid and you knew it all along," said Nathan Ives hotly.

CHAPTER IX

A LONG silence fell. It was broken by Ralph. For just a moment he had stood spellbound by the words of accusation, but now measured speech came to him.

"I acquit you of being crazy, Ives," he said coldly. "You're not demented. There is only one other answer— Explain what you have just said!"

"Good Lord, man! Is any explanation necessary? Jerry Lane has lived here since the first white man came in to the diggings. All men knew him; all men liked him. You came here yesterday, a perfect stranger to all men. No one knows anything about you. You are Jerry Lane's nephew, and he made you his heir. You will inherit all that he has left, which amounts to about forty-five thousand dollars, enough to make most men here in Deadwood commit a score of murders.

"All that any one knows of you is what Jerry Lane told me—and your uncle said that he had never even seen you. Within twenty-four hours of your arrival you manage to have two rows with the old man so that I could hear it over at my house. He made you his heir and you tie up with the daughter of his bitterest enemy—Tom Preston, his old partner, who cheated him out of a lot of money. Then came a row with the old man and you gave him the medicine that you had previously stolen from my dispensary. I told you to take nitrate of amyl. You took prussic acid. You are a college graduate and you must have known very well what the effect would be of the stuff that you took. Any mere fool would know that the mere smell of prussic acid kills instantly. Now——"

Ralph stood straight and tall, looking at Ives during the terrific arraignment.

"Do you mean to say in all seriousness that you believe what you have said? That you accuse me of the deliberate murder of my uncle?"

His blood seemed to have chilled to ice in his veins and he felt physically sick. Coupled with the feeling was a keen desire to commit murder on the person of this sleek, plausible doctor who had so effectively summed up the damning facts. Ives pointed to the open doors and windows.

"Why, man alive! You have even taken the precaution to open all the air passages so that the draft would carry off all the fumes. If I had been three minutes later there would have been no trace of the cause of the death."

A sudden flash of recollection came to Ralph. By a superhuman effort he regained his calmness and spoke easily enough.

"There is one rather important thing, doctor, that you have not considered. I have been told by my uncle that in case of my death the property that is left will go to you! You are the next heir. How about that?"

"Do you mean to say that you will make counter-charges that I am the one who gave you a medicine that I must have known well would kill Jeremiah Lane? And that because I would stand to inherit the property after something should happen to you? No, no, Keene. You can't put that across here. That is a little too far-fetched even for a mining camp. It is as clear as crystal to me and will be to every man when they learn the facts. Sudden desire for wealth, ambition whetted to an edge by the knowledge that you were due to inherit a considerable sum of money— It is all very sad,

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Keene— If I am wrong, I am sorry—very sorry. I hope that you can clear yourself. I do, indeed. There must be an investigation, of course. I will do all that I can to help you. I am the executor of the estate. What have you there?" he demanded sharply, as Ralph began picking from the floor some papers and the nuggets that had fallen there unobserved.

"Nothing that has anything to do with you—till after you shall have hanged me," said Ralph curtly. "You had better get out, Ives, before I man-handle you——"

Ives fairly ground his teeth as he tried to stare down those gray eyes that seemed to bore their way into his. Then his own eyes wavered and sank and he turned away. The next moment Ralph heard his feet grinding on the gravelly path as he crossed the gully to his own house.

When the sound of Ives' feet died away, Ralph set himself to work to consider the case. First of all he lifted the body to the bed and drew a sheet over it. Then he sat down and considered all things that had taken place.

His three years in the rough mining camps of the newly discovered West had taught him what would probably happen here and now. There was no law north of Cheyenne, for west of the Mississippi the law stayed by the railroads. In every place where gold had been found the procedure was the same. One miner had alliteratively expressed it:

"The first three steps in the development of a place are gold, girls, and gallows. After that comes gospel shops and gaols. When you've got them, you've got 'em all."

Deadwood already had gold, gallows and girls. The gospels had not yet crossed the Northern Divide and the nearest jail was at Cheyenne far to the south. He knew well what would happen. When the death of Jerry Lane should become known to the men who had foregathered with him in bar and mine for the past two years there would be an outburst of passion and popular indignation, for Jerry was a popular man and in that outburst a man accused of having murdered him would probably come to harm. Men would not stop to argue or listen to reason. If the alleged murderer had been a man well known to all the miners he would at least have a hearing, but he, Ralph, was a stranger. The real danger would lie in the first few hours after the death should become known.

Ives, of course, had a reputation in the community that would far remove him from any suspicion in the affair. When Ralph reviewed all these things in his own mind he began to worry for the first time.

Could he prove his innocence?

HE KNEW perfectly well that he had taken those pearls from the bottle that Ives had pointed out. He had certainly looked at the labels. Ives had been talking to him while he worked at something else. Could he have got hold of the wrong bottle or were those capsules deliberately placed in the wrong bottle so that he would get them. Could it be possible that Ives had arranged the affair so that all blame would fall on him, trusting in his own well-established reputation to go free. A sudden shout from the street drew him to the door. He saw Ives standing on the sidewalk talking excitedly to three men. Even as he watched, the group walked into the yawning doors of the nearest saloon and the door closed.

This was the opportunity that he wished for, to take another look at those two bottles in the dispensary. He seized his hat and ran down the hill and across the gorge, climbing in feverish haste to the house above him. The back door was closed but unlocked, and he walked quickly into the little dispensary.

All was exactly as he had left it when he had been there earlier in the day. The line of the bottles was undisturbed. He stepped to the end of the shelf from which he had taken that fatal bottle that was supposed to hold the nitrate of amyl pearls. Both bottles stood as before. To save his soul he could not tell one from the other without the labels nor could he distinguish between the capsules. He looked at the labels on the brown glass. They were printed with red ink on white paper and were pasted on the bottles. On the first he read the cabalistic letters $C_5H_{11}ONO$.

"I reckon that must be the nitrate of amyl. Certainly this—" he picked up the other bottle and read on it the letters HCN — "is hydrocyanic acid—prussic acid."

He reached for the first bottle and to his astonishment the newly-pasted label was still wet with paste. Then he examined the label on the prussic acid bottle. Both had been freshly pasted on the glass.

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Full realization of what had been done struck him like a blow in the face. It was perfectly evident. The labels on the bottles had been changed, but why? Why had not the capsules simply been poured into other bottles? He shook himself into life and a sudden realization of the fact that all this was futile now. The damage had been done and very cleverly done, too. How could he combat the evidence that Ives would adduce against him? How could he ever convince men who knew Ives that the doctor had changed the labels on the bottles? He felt in his heart that it would be impossible. Brooding deeply, he started back to his uncle's cabin.

As he stood on the steps he saw a party of men come out of a saloon below him. He was very certain of what would take place. That group would go to another saloon where they would hear of the death of Jerry Lane. Then they would go to another saloon to talk the thing over. No debate was ever settled in Deadwood in just one saloon and he felt positive that Ives was in some way responsible for those groups forming in the streets as they were doing.

He determined that he would forestall Ives by going down into the town and demanding an investigation. To be sure, there was no marshal in the diggings but there were surely enough men who loved law and order to see that an impartial investigation was made and he felt very certain that if he could tell his story before Ives could make his appeal to the rough element of the mining camp that he would get some form of justice.

As he walked up the slope another thought came to him and he hesitated. Today was Saturday. In most communities this would make no difference, but in Deadwood in 1876 it had a peculiar significance. It meant that by noon—and that was long past—every worker in the diggings would have been paid off; all owners of outlying claims would be in town. All gambling joints would be running full blast; all saloons would be wide open. In short every man in Deadwood would be either drunk himself or striving in all hospitality to make some one else drunk and no man can appeal successfully to a drunken man's judgment. He could not even appeal as did the Macedonian woman 'From Philip drunk to Philip sober' for no one would be sober in Deadwood for two days.

On the top step of Jerry Lane's house stood a small boy looking perplexedly about him. He hailed Ralph with evident relief.

"Are you Mr. Keene?" he asked.

"That's me, sonny. What is it?"

"I was told to give you this, sir, and not to let any one see me do it."

He thrust a soiled paper into Ralph's hand and was off down the hill at a run. Ralph opened the note quickly. It might be an important message from Peter Boyce. The next moment he had nearly dropped it in his surprize. It had been written hastily with a hard pencil on a bit of soft paper and it was difficult to decipher. Once read, the words limned themselves in his memory as with fire:

Dear Mr. Keene: Mrs. Clarke has just come from the grocery store. She tells me that Doctor Ives has been going through many of the saloons telling the miners that you poisoned your uncle with medicine that you took from his office and a mob is forming. This is to warn you.

Your friend,

MARY PRESTON.

P. S.—I don't believe it.

M. P.

AS HE stood scanning first the note and then his surroundings, his gaze fell on that long gray woolen stocking that Mrs. Clarke had given him to be given to his uncle. Mechanically he picked it up and opened it. There was a long roll of foolscap paper and some more nuggets like those that he had picked up from the floor. He unrolled the paper and saw on it a rough sketch drawn in purple ink with compass bearings and distances. Instinctively he compared it with the map that Jerry Lane had spread upon the table. Jerry's map had been a rough outline map of the western country. This latest paper was a rough sketch of no place in particular.

"By gracious," he muttered: "I'll bet it's the sketch to the location of the lost Blue Bucket diggings. It's darned valuable to me just now. It's about as much use as a pair of dice at a church festival."

Without another look at it, he rolled it up and thrust it back into its protecting stocking and thrust it into his pocket. All interest in lesser matters had been completely overshadowed by the greater incident of his uncle's death.

The affair had been very adroitly planned. Jerry Lane was dead and if something unforeseen did not occur to prevent it a mass meeting of drunken miners would call

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on him to explain—and he could not give an explanation that even a sober man would accept without much proof. Certainly Ives would never have ventured on such a plot unless he had been very sure that he could carry it to completion.

All these matters were taken from his hands. When Ives left the house he had gone back to his own cabin. He had certain things to do that would not brook delay and for fifteen minutes he had busied himself in his dispensary. When he had settled all things to his liking and had replaced two bottles upon the shelf, he washed his hands, took a steadying drink and headed for the main street.

Little groups of men newly paid off, men who had just cleaned up their own riffles, men who had been laboriously packing pay dirt from stamp head to sluice mill were gathering on every corner. The doors of every saloon stood wide open and into each a line of thirsty souls was pouring. Red shirts, blue shirts, black shirts mingled with the red, blue, white and yellow dresses of the women who had come hundreds of miles through the wilderness to pander to their appetites for liquor and worse; to gather from the miners their spoils of sluice and riffle and sand-bar.

Tired of waiting for his partner in the little cabin for which he was paying the rent of a mansion, Peter Boyce moved from group to group as he saw them forming along the street. Common gossip, the jade of the camp, might give him some indication of a good claim for sale or of a likely location. While he strolled about he watched for Ralph. Moving from place to place he found himself outside the gaping doors of the Black Sand saloon. Naturally enough his steps led him to the bar where he planted himself at the end calling for a drink.

The room was filled and men in every attitude leaned over the bar or laid upon the faro table, the roulette wheel, the monte table. In the rear of the room, an itinerant preacher, the first to carry the Gospels into the Black Hills, was holding forth to a listening crowd. Calamity Jane was in that crowd too, dressed in a smoke-tanned buckskin suit with two heavy pistols swinging at her belt. Boyce saw Iron-hook Bates grinning over her shoulder.

He turned his back on them to escape recognition and tipped his drink. At his elbow, cut off from the main room by a slatted screen six feet high was a little cubicle where men seeking privacy to drink might find it. Where old Peter Boyce stood, his ear was very close to that slatted partition and he could hear with some difficulty what was said close to him. Several men sat inside that cubicle and every word came muffled and indistinct to the old prospector.

"I tell you—" said a voice—"Jerry Lane was poisoned——"

Peter Boyce stiffened at the words as a good pointer stiffens to a whiff of the body scent. It was Ives' voice, though Peter Boyce did not know it.

"I tell you men that Jerry Lane was poisoned an hour and a half ago. He was poisoned by his own nephew—young Keene. He came in from the south two days ago. The old man had made a will in which he made young Keene his heir and he sent for him because I had told him that he was a mighty sick man and needed some one to be with him at all times. When the youngster found that he was to inherit old Jerry's pile he couldn't wait for it so he—fixed old Jerry. He slipped some poison into him that he took from my dispensary——"

"Hold on, doc," hiccupped a voice in drunken seriousness. "Hold on, doc! That's a bad charge to lodge agin a man. Poisonin' a man comes derned near to bein' murder, don't it? I ain't no lawyer."

A roar of half-drunken laughter assured the seeker after knowledge that poisoning was closely akin to murder. Ives went on and his voice took a keener edge. He was talking with a purpose.

"It's up to you all. I'm not especially interested in the affair. If you all are going to stand for this kind of a thing, decent people won't come to this place. Nobody will be safe if this man can do this and get away with it. I tell you, you fellows ought to do something about it."

"How do you know he was poisoned, doc?"

"Young Keene came to me to get some medicine for his uncle. I showed him the bottle and told him to take it. The bottle next to it had poison in it and was marked He took the poison and gave it to his uncle. It was prussic acid and a smell of it kills a man instantly. When I got there Jerry was dead and Keene had opened the doors and windows to get rid of the smell. I only found it out because I found the smell of it on the old man before it had time to be

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blown away. I caught Keene with the goods. I tell you fellows, you ought to do something about it."

"What kind of a something, doc?"

The question bred silence; a silence that could almost be felt. Peter Boyce, listening till his ears ached, could feel the tension. Presently Big Bill Halloran spoke and his resonant roar rumbled like surf on a sandy beach.

"Well, doc! What you say goes, I reckon. You don't need to make any affydavits to convince me— I reckon it's a case for a jury——"

"A jury? Jury ——!" Ives almost spat the words. "There's no law north of Cheyenne and well you know it— There's no jury here——"

"I reckon there is—" Halloran spat the words deliberately. "There's the best kind of a jury for things like this—a miners' jury!"

AGAIN silence fell and Peter Boyce leaning against the partition felt his heart sink. He knew well enough what the action of a miners' jury, informed by Doctor Ives, in whom they all had confidence, would be. He had seen those juries act in other places at other times. In times past he had acted on them. Automatically he looked at his watch, paid for his drink and sauntered out of the place. There was but one thing to do and he meant to do it. Ralph Keene must leave the place and leave quickly.

Fortunately their ponies were corraled behind their new house and that very day he had bought enough supplies to last them for two months. In 1876 among such surroundings men thought and acted quickly.

When he was out of sight from the saloon the old man quickened his pace to a run. At the cabin he frenziedly got guns, supplies and ammunition, and stowed them feverishly in the packs and in twenty minutes after he had reached the cabin he had saddled Ralph's pony and his own, swung the packs on the two astonished pack-ponies and slipped Ralph's rifle in the scabbard.

"We'll have to burn the trail," he panted. "They'll be after us as soon as that derned scoundrel Ives kin stir 'em up to the right heat. Come on, boys!"

A hearty slap on his pony's haunch sent him at a hand gallop among the loose boulders headed south along the slope, the pack-ponies following at a lope, as he knew they would. It was a short eight hundred yards to Jerry Lane's house and Peter Boyce drew a breath of relief as he sighted Ralph standing in the square of the open door.

"What's the matter, Pete? I wasn't lookin' for you."

"There's —— to pay, son, and no pitch hot. Heard anything?"

In a few well chosen pointed words as hot as glowing embers, Ralph told him succinctly what had happened. Peter Boyce's eyes and mouth registered astonishment and surprise.

"Aye—" he nodded. "I heard some of that in the bar at the Black Sand but I didn't know what to think. I thought maybe Ives was just drunk and tellin' a lie. How did it happen?"

Ralph told him again in words of fire. "I didn't do it, Pete," he added.

"You don't have to tell *me* that, son. But there 're a lot of people around here who don't know you who'll take some showin' and—we can't show 'em. Some day you might convince them if they happen to be sober by accident but they won't even listen to you now. Today they'd do anything for a new sensation. Get on that pony and we'll be movin'."

"If I run away it will be taken as a confession of guilt," Ralph demurred.

"A miners' jury is only called to find a guilty man. You know that as well as I do and you can guess darned close who it'll be, too. If Doc Ives gives information to a crowd of them drunks you know what they'll do, don't you? If you stay here, you'll stretch hemp as sure as a gun's iron. They'll hang you first. Then they'll get sober and be sorry and investigate but that won't do you no good. You'll be dead! That's the boy!"

For Ralph had gathered up the reins and swung into saddle.

"All right, Pete. You're the boss. Which way?"

"There ain't but one way." Peter Boyce nodded his head toward the black, forbidding slopes that walled out the western land.

"My Lord, Pete! We can't go out there——"

"We can't go anywhere else. If we go south or east they'll get a sheriff on our trail and they've got the evidence. Don't forget that! The law will grab you and you can't prove your innocence. North is

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into the very mouths of the Sioux——"

"But west——"

"We've got no other choice," said Mr. Boyce fiercely. "Don't you see that? It's our one best bet. We'll hit for the western country and the Overland trail. In ten days good pony travel we kin hit the Oregon trail and make for the upper reaches of Green River and then——the Coast."

"We can never make the Coast with four ponies——"

"Hundreds of women an' children have made every inch of it afoot. Take your choice. I ain't particular but— Look there!"

His pointing finger drew Ralph's gaze to a great crowd of men; men afoot and men on horseback, yelling, shouting, cursing, but moving steadily up the slope toward them. Even while he watched, uncertain what to do, a shot rang out and a bullet spatted viciously in the shale at his feet, throwing up a spit of red dust.

"That's the way Ives has made 'em feel," commented the old prospector grimly. "They're in a nice mood fer argument. Say the word, son, and we'll get inside the hut and hold 'em back as long as we can. It can't have but one endin' but——"

"Come on, then," said Ralph desperately. "Up the hill, you rascal!" He smote his pony with his sombrero and took the hill at a gallop, Peter Boyce herding the pack-ponies on at a canter. Up, up, up they went scrambling, sliding, panting but always going up till they reached the far crest above the pines. One long look down the hill at the angry crowd below them; at the sordid, seething life of the riotous camp, and Ralph Keene turned his face to the west and went on.

He had no choice in the matter.

CHAPTER X

WHEN they had crossed the second ridge they pulled their sweating ponies to a walk and took account of stock. If there should be a real pursuit they would need every breath in their horses and it is always bad policy to begin a long trip with winded animals.

From the crest of that ridge they could see far down the valley of the Whitewood to the north. Away to the south, Custer Peak thrust a whitened finger against the blue arch of the sky. Across that ridge, behind them, some hundreds of drunken miners clamored to lay hands on one of them. The west alone promised them refuge, the west that lay behind that forbidding wall of lofty snow-capped peaks, with its rapid, rushing rivers filled now with melting snows; whose plains were filled with war-parties of the hostile tribes, Sioux and Cheyennes, Ogallala and Crows.

They must cross the very heart of the Crow country if they were to strike the Oregon trail, for that trail lay far to the south and west of where they stood. In general the route lay about as follows: Fort Laramie, Independence Rock, and Sweet Water. From there they would strike the great South Pass and down the Green River, and so on to the Columbia. It would be a long and hard trip and dangerous beyond words for two men. They would have to depend almost wholly upon their rifles for food and they had but a scanty supply of ammunition; perhaps three hundred rounds of rifle ammunition for each of them and a few pistol cartridges. This with a hundred pounds of bacon, fifteen salt, some sugar and a small sack of coffee with some flour, formed their outfit. It was no wonder that Peter Boyce sighed as he looked at the panting pack-ponies.

"You're gruntin' over your packs, now, darn you," he growled: "We'll be doin' the gruntin' before this trip is over." He looked keenly at Ralph. His downcast air smote the old man and he spoke up cheerily.

"Cheer up, son. Everything will be all right from now on. Tell me what happened."

Ralph told him with more detail than he had given before.

"He double-crossed you, did he? Darn such a skunk, anyway. We've got to give him credit for doin' a good job while he was about it, though. Ordinarily I would say that a man ought not to hate his enemies because he generally makes them himself but here the case is different."

"But, Pete, I hate like the mischief to drag you into this thing. It would have been bad enough just to have lost the money that the old man left me but to have it happen so that you, too, have to run like a coyote to keep from being handled by a mob is too bad. I hate dragging you into it—as I say."

"Who? Me?" Mr. Boyce's tone was jubilant. "Why, son, I've always wanted a good look at this western land. I've heard

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Jim Bridger talk about it till I felt like callin' him a liar just on general principles and now I'll see it and can tell some lies myself when we git back. Sometimes I feel that I'm a fool fer wastin' all my life rock-punchin' and minin'. Out of forty years I've spent at it I honestly believe I've spent about thirty-three years huntin' up strayed horses and burros. We'll hit the Coast and take up some land maybe. A few square miles of corn land with some thousands of horned cattle feedin' on the range'll be better than this."

Ralph grinned sympathetically.

"Of course, all that is just waitin' for us over the next divide——"

"Of course it is," said Mr. Boyce stoutly. "It's like the Mother Lode. Did you ever know a prospector who didn't figger on what he'd do when he should strike the Mother Lode? Why you've made up your own mind a score of times what you'd do with it—but you don't believe in it. Hey?"

It was true enough. By many a lonely camp-fire, Ralph, like every other prospector, had built his Castles in Spain. His grin answered for him.

"We'll make out all right. I'll tell you what I think about it. We'll strike due west for a bit, head for the Powder River and go around the Big Horn Mountains to the north. Once past them we'll hit southwest for Fort Hall on the Snake River. The rest will be easy——"

"Why not strike due south for the Overland trail from here?" asked Ralph. It seemed the wise thing to do.

"There are two reasons. First, if we strike south we'll have to go through the Cheyenne and Arapaho country and you know what they'd do to us if they should catch us. By goin' to the north we miss them and pass through the Crow country and they are always at war with the Sioux. But the main reason is that we've got to depend on our rifles for grub and the game has been driven away from this part of the Big Crossin'." By which Mr. Boyce meant the Oregon Trail.

"That's so. I forgot that."

"All right, then. Powder River can't be more'n a hundred miles to the west. After that we'll be gropin' in the dark anyway. Let's hit the trail——"

As a matter of fact the pursuit had died away in the first ten miles. When the first hot fever of pursuing had cooled, the miners realized that they did not especially care about overtaking the fugitives. Ives would have given much to have had Ralph Keene fall into the hands of that angry mob —while it *was* a mob, and still inflamed with whisky. To have him arrested by a crowd of serious, sober, thinking men would be a very different thing. The rest of the miners did not care.

A fleeing coyote or deer would have given them quite as much excitement for the time being. Then, too, though few would have confessed it, few men really cared to wander into those dark defiles in pursuit of men who had rifles and would use them. Jim Bridger, Jim Baker, Jim Beckworth might have done it, but the pursuers were miners, not explorers.

"Let's get back. The main thing is to have got them fellers out of camp. They can't live out there. We're well rid of 'em."

So the tide of pursuit sucked back again into the deep canyon of Deadwood and life began again in saloons and dance-halls.

ON THE way back Ives sought and found Iron-hook Bates who had been first in pursuit as he was first to return.

"Come up to my house as soon as you can, Bates, and bring Preston with you."

Iron-hook had some difficulty in locating Mr. Preston. He probably would not have found him at all but for the obliging disclosure of the bar-tender in the Sixty Six saloon.

"He *was* here a bit ago tryin' to get a few drinks. I told him that his credit was no more good than a wax altar candle in —— and he said that that bein' so, he'd go take up a collection from his daughter who's livin' up on the hill with old Ma Clarke."

On this information Mr. Bates found Mr. Preston half-drunk, hanging over the palings of Mrs. Clarke's front fence trying to induce Mary to give him enough money to last him till the next day.

He caught Tom by the shoulder and shook him lightly.

"Hi, Preston! Come on up to Doc Ives. He wants to see you."

"He shan't go a step down town without me," declared Mary, not without reason. "He's bad enough when he is by himself, but when he gets with you all I know there is worse yet to happen to him. I'm going with him——"

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Mrs. Clarke had seen the by-play from the house and though she had not heard a word of the talk, she spoke up with perfect appositeness.

"That's right, dearie! You stick right to it, too," she cackled. "Don't you let him go noways. These days men all think they've got holler legs and kin drink all night without gettin' drunk. Look at 'im now—" She indicated with a weaving forefinger Mr. Preston who was trying to convince the world and himself that he had not been drinking.

"If Jerry Lane's dead I want my map back," she wailed with sudden emphasis. "I mean the map that I gave to his nephew to give to Jerry. I want it back, I say. It was in a long, gray woolen stockin'— You saw it—" She turned on Mary. "Oh, you needn't look like that—" For Mr. Bates' mouth had dropped open in frank surprize. "I gave young Keene a map to give to Jerry Lane, and now Jerry is dead and I want my map back. There ain't one of you that I'd trust with a plugged copper cent now that Jerry's gone."

Preston had suddenly sobered in the prompt way that some men have. He was very certain of what Mrs. Clarke meant. The map that she spoke of would be nothing else but the sketch to the Blue Bucket that Jerry Lane had counted on to locate the diggings. It was the very thing that he and Ives and Bates would need.

"All right," he said slowly. "I know what she's talkin' about. At least I think I do. Come on, then, if you've got to come where you're not wanted," he snarled at his daughter. With a curt word to the garrulous Mrs. Clarke who followed them to the gate, still demanding her map, Preston led Bates and Mary along the rough track that led to Ives' house.

When they had entered the house, Ives stood on no ceremony. Without even a word of greeting, he jerked out forcefully:

"Young Keene poisoned his uncle today. The old man has had several sharp attacks of heart trouble lately and I told Keene to come here for some medicine for Jerry. While he was here he took advantage of his opportunity and took from a bottle some capsules containing prussic acid, without my seeing him do it. Later Jerry had an attack and young Keene used the prussic acid instead of the medicine that I had told him to use. Jerry died immediately. Of course Keene was due to inherit what the old man left and he knew it."

Mary Preston was the first to speak.

"I had heard some of this before," she said slowly; "but there are some things that I do not understand about it. For instance, if he was his uncle's heir, why should he have killed him?"

"Heaven knows! Men have vagaries. Keene has been drinking and gambling since he has been here and it may be that he needed the money at once."

Now there are just two things that any one will believe about a man without proof. One of them is that he has been drinking. Mary Preston had seen Ralph Keene in the saloons and she had seen him drinking, and, although every instinct in her called for disbelief in the general charge, still he might have been drunk, and her experience with her father had led her to believe that a drunken man might do anything. She was somewhat taken aback but she asked another question.

"What do you use prussic acid for, doctor?"

"For many things," replied Ives evasively. "Keene and his partner have both left. They did not dare stand an investigation and the worst of it is that they have with them that map that old Jerry Lane was given by Mrs. Clarke. I mean that sketch of the location of the Blue Bucket Diggings. Jerry told me some time ago that he was planning a trip into the hills to look up a claim that some one was going to give him a map of. I found out later that it was old Ma Clarke. Now Jerry is dead and Keene has the map.

"The question before us is, are we going to let those two land pirates get away with the map that belongs to the old woman and locate the lost Blue Bucket for themselves? They would never have gone west with that map unless they had been pretty confident that they had a sure thing. I'll bet they had planned to go anyway, and that this affair of Jerry Lane simply hurried them."

"It is more than likely though that Keene, who knew that he was to be his uncle's heir, wanted to have the horns go with the hide. He knew about the Blue Bucket and he knew that Jerry had the map so he slipped him the prussic acid so he could get both." This last from Tom Preston.

Ives looked hard at him. Then he nodded slowly.

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"Yes. That's probably the real solution. The main thing is that those two men will escape all the consequences for the murder that Keene undoubtedly committed and they will walk away with the Blue Bucket unless we do something. Are you two men game enough to go with me?"

"Where to, doc?"

"To go after them. To trail them to the place, wherever it is, where they find the Blue Bucket—if they do find it. To arrest Keene and bring him back here to stand trial for the murder of Jerry Lane in case they do not find it. If they find the place, it's as much ours as theirs and anyhow, Keene ought to be brought back. We can get packs and ponies and start after 'em. They will need to be better plainsmen than I think they are to throw you, Bates, or you, Preston, off the trail. They will travel slowly, for it will never occur to them that they are being followed."

There followed a long and heated argument. In the course of that argument Mary expressed herself heatedly and she used the word "dishonest." Ives used it to clinch the argument.

"HOW can it be dishonest, Miss Preston? We are not trying to take from them anything that belongs to them. You yourself heard Mrs. Clarke tell Keene that the map was for his uncle. When Jerry died, if Keene had been honest, he would have taken the map back to old Mrs. Clarke. We are simply trailing them and are ready to profit by the knowledge that a certain stream that they may locate contains gold. Of course if the news should get out there would be a stampede, so we are not going to tell it to any one. If the Diggings knew this, every man would be packing up and hitting the trail after us. We must be first on the ground. After us it doesn't make any difference how many come. The more the merrier. How about you, Bates?"

"Oh, I suppose you're right, doc. Nothin' venture, nothin' have. But it's like eatin' a crow stuffed with snuff. I can do it, but I'll be —— if I hanker for it."

"Preston?"

Tom Preston nodded acquiescence. He did not want to go. The trip would be long and hard and dangerous, but there was too much at stake. He did not dare remain at home.

"Yes, I'll go," he said. "And now, Doc, give us a drink to seal the bargain."

"You don't need a drink to seal such a bargain," said Mary hotly, as Ives set a bottle on the table.

"Sure we do—" Ives tipped the bottle to a glass. "Don't the Good Book say, 'Wine is a mocker an' strong drink is ragin' and whoso is overcome thereby shall have everlastin' life'? Here's to all of you."

They gulped down the potent liquor.

As her father set down his empty glass, Mary faced him determinedly.

"I suppose you realize," she said sharply, "that I am going with you——"

"You? Indeed I don't. Why, girl, you're crazy——"

"If you think that I am going to remain in this place subject to the same annoyances that I have had for the past two days, you are very much mistaken. I will not stay in this place, and I will go with you."

"But, my land, Mary! The trip may be mighty dangerous——"

"It can't be any more dangerous for me than for you, and Heaven knows I am no more helpless than you are in a place like this. I am going and there is no room for debate. I'm not afraid in the hills, but I am afraid in this horrible place."

Ives pondered for a moment.

"I don't think we will be gone more than ten days," he said presently. "With the three of us along she will be all right, Preston. Let her go if she really wishes to. That is, if she is willing to do without a tent. We can't carry any luxuries."

"I understand," said Mary briefly "Thank you, Doctor Ives. I can ride as well as any of you. Of course I will cook on the trip."

She did not voice her real fears about being left behind. She really feared new attempts by Calamity Jane to force her into that dance-hall life. Ralph Keene had helped her once, but her father was no protection so long as he lived in a place where he could get whisky. Several weeks of clean living in the hills would give him a chance to get a fresh grip on himself if he would take it. She counted a great deal on that trip into the hills.

"That is settled, then," said Ives in a tone of great relief. "You men get your packs and ponies and be ready to leave with me tomorrow by noon. In the meantime be sure that you do not let a word drop as to where

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we are going or why. If the news once got out two hundred men would be packin' up tonight. Good night."

They went out into the dark and blundered down the rocky trail. Mary was ahead and behind her she could hear the men blundering along among the shale and the boulders. The rising wind roared and screeched through the lofty pines far above them, beating down their voices to a whisper as they strove to shout to each other. Twice Preston shouted something at Mary, but she could not hear him so she bent her head to the blast and hastened on. Then in a sudden lull of the wind she heard a hoarse undertone from Iron-hook Bates whose faintest whisper was like a roar from other men.

"Say, Preston! Wouldn't it be funny if old Doc Ives had give that stuff to Jerry Lane hisself and then blamed it on Keene?"

Her heart almost missed a beat. Iron-hook Bates had voiced her own thought.

She was more than ever determined now to go with her father on the projected trip. What if Bates was right in his wild supposition? What if her own dimly sensed suspicion were correct? If Ives had made a false accusation, how could it be disproved? If there was anything in what Bates had said, then Ralph Keene, an innocent man, had been driven from civilization into the wilds like a hunted animal.

She felt sure, too, that if Peter Boyce and Ralph Keene had gone to look up the Blue Bucket Diggings that they would not allow themselves to be balked by any one. She would certainly go with her father's party. There was nothing else for her to do. Even to herself she would not confess that there was any other motive—that she would dearly love to see Ralph Keene clear himself of the charge that Ives had made against him.

They left at noon the next day, just eighteen hours after Peter Boyce and Ralph had flogged their ponies over the Divide and the last words that they heard from any one in Deadwood seemed almost prophetic in the light of later events. A man was dismounting from a stage coach that had drawn up in front of a saloon and in reply to a question of—

"What's the news from below?" he shouted back to his questioner:

"There're all kinds of rumors of a new war scare. They say there will be —— breakin' loose among the tribes this summer. Terry and Gibbons are gatherin' troops up at Fort Abraham Lincoln in Dakota——"

"Hear that?" Bates turned to Ives, who was riding directly behind him. "Do you still feel like goin'?"

Ives paid no attention to him. If he heard the question at all he simply disregarded it.

"Pull out," he said curtly. "We've got to hit Yellow Creek to-night."

CHAPTER XI

IN 1876 the Western Frontier was a very real frontier. For many years the whites had been steadily encroaching on the lands of the Indians and always with the same results. That process has a name to-day. It is called the process of infiltration, and the business of stealing land from the original owners has also received a title from European statesmen. It is called the rectification of frontiers. Put into plain English that means that after a treaty has been signed and a frontier set that a few hardy spirits or land-grabbers—the title depends on which side of the fence their acts are viewed from—slip through into the new lands.

Then a few more come and widen the breach. Then more and more come till the original owners are at last outnumbered. Each new discovery of gold in the lands beyond the established frontier meant a new breaking of all treaties with the Indians. It was not gold alone that drew the peril-loving white man. Gold, silver, timber, furs, land—any excuse was good enough to draw many men who, having nothing at home, could but profit by the change. Naturally they were killed by the Indians who had a perfectly ridiculous feeling that the land belonged to them alone and that all white men were trespassers. The results were always the same, a rectified frontier, a new treaty that neither party intended to keep and a series of murders and reprisals.

In 1876 the line of the Western Frontier was roughly a line drawn from Fort Abraham Lincoln at Bismarck in Dakota, south through Fort Laramie and Fort D. A. Russell to the line of the Rio Grande. This line was pierced in three places by the Oregon trail that ran northwestward from Council Bluffs, by the line of the Union

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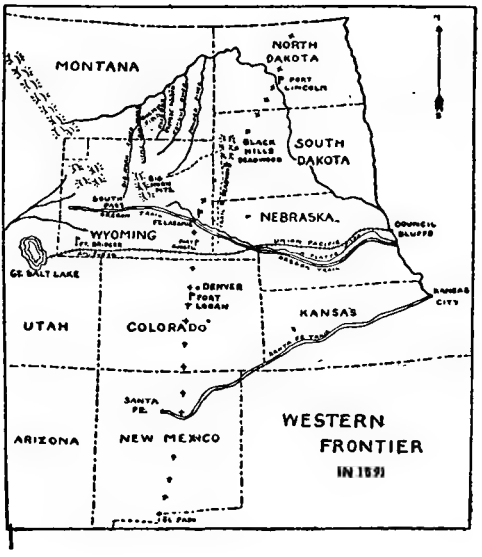
Pacific railroad that had been recently completed and by the Salt Lake trail along which streams of emigrants poured to the golden lands of the Far West. There had



been two forts established beyond the frontier, Fort C. F. Smith and Fort Kearney, but both had been the scenes of bloody Indian fighting, both were fruitful causes of Indian troubles and both had been abandoned by executive order in 1868.

All the land touching the northwestern frontier belonged to the Sioux who did not wish any white men in their territory. They had learned by bitter experience that the advent of the white man meant game indiscriminately slaughtered and ultimately the loss of the land itself. But the white man could not be kept back.

The discovery of gold in the Black Hills brought the Indian war of 1876 to full fruition, for the Indians, hemmed in by the Union Pacific to the south saw their lands being lessened daily, and, where gold is found, the white man will come if he were to lose his immortal soul in the coming. Beyond that frontier lay a veritable *terra incognita,* a land of great mountains, of limitless plains and of rushing rivers, and, over all this vast domain roamed war-parties of many tribes, Crows and Bannocks, Sioux and Cheyennes, Caddos and Blackfeet and a score of other peoples all ready and willing to kill and scalp each other on occasion, all seeking their livelihood from the great herds of buffalo, elk and antelope and from the myriad of smaller game that crowded that hunter's paradise. Above all, each and every one was ready at all times to kill, with all the varied forms of Indian deviltry, any white man who should fall into their hands.

It was into this land that Ralph Keene and Peter Boyce had thrust themselves in their attempt to reach the Oregon trail and so to get to the far Pacific slope.

Beyond a simple denial from his partner, Peter Boyce had never desired any disproof of the accusation that Ives had made against him. On the first day the old man had puzzled a good deal over the matter, but he finally shelved the whole question of the death of Jerry Lane as being not worth bothering about when he had such really important things to think of as wood and water and grass for their stock. Now, however, as they made camp on the first night he began to think of it. But he said nothing till the hobbled animals had been turned out to graze, the packs settled where they would be most accessible in case of an Indian attack and Ralph had set about cooking supper.

"Hold on there, boy! That kind of wood may be good enough to use in Colorado but it won't do out here." Peter Boyce took from Ralph some sticks that he had found after long searching, examined them and threw them away. "They're too wet! That wood would give out black smoke and we can't afford black smoke till after sundown. It might cost us our hair. Use buffalo chips. There are plenty of 'em lyin' around. Dig a hole and make your fire in it. Then when we're done with the fire we can bury it and move our camp a half-mile or so."

"I didn't realize that we would have to be as careful as all that," said the surprized Ralph.

"Only because we are so small a party. But—" the old man wagged an impressive finger under his partner's nose— "from here till we strike the Oregon trail our lives are worth just exactly the amount of trouble that we take to keep 'em. There may not be an Indian within a thousand miles of us. There may be a war-party lyin' in wait for us over the next ridge. It's better to be sure than sorry."

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THEY got supper and changed the location of their camp, settling for the night, not in the bottom-land near the water where most white men would have camped, but on a bare and windy ridge, picketing their horses among the low scrub on the sheltered hill-flank. When they had bedded down for the night the old man said shortly:

"Now that you have left Deadwood for good, Ralph, who do you reckon will get the pile that your uncle left?"

Ralph looked up at him. "Why—Doctor Ives, I reckon—Why do you ask?"

Peter Boyce shook his head as one who scares away a fly.

"He was only to inherit the property after you," he said. "He can't touch it till he can prove that you are dead."

"What do you figure on from that, Pete?"

"I'm just tryin' to do a little figurin' on my own account. It looks this way to me: That man Ives was to inherit forty-five thousand dollars in case you die. Simply tellin' the miners that you killed old Jerry Lane and gettin' them to chase you out of the diggin's don't get him anywhere. You've got to die for him to get the coin. Of course he figured that they would catch you an' lynch you before they asked any questions but—you got away and he's in a mess. He has overplayed his hand. If you were still in Deadwood he would have a chance to get you, but you ain't in Deadwood and he has still got to get you if he means to handle that money. That bein' so, there is but one thing fer him to do—to follow you out here. Of course there is just a chance that a wanderin' party of Sioux or Bannocks might help him out but he can't count on that.

"They would do it all right if they could lay their hands on us which I'm aimin', with the grace o' God an' the Beecher's Bible, they shan't do. It's what I'd do if I was in his place. They've got a lot of good plainsmen in Deadwood who're out of a job right now. Preston can't be beat at trailin' and they say that Iron-hook Bates is a wonder at findin' a blind trail. Either one of 'em would pack a load of dynamite through ——fire fer a dollar. I'm goin' to assume that they *will* foller us till I am dead sure that we're not bein' followed. It can't hurt us none to be careful. You've lost a pile of money through bein' careless and it won't do to lose your scalp as well. If we do get knocked on the head some night I'd rather it was by the stone-headed coup-stick of a Sioux warrior than by that iron bale-hook that our friends Bates packs with him. I don't aim to have him count *coup* on me."

"What's counting *coup*, Pete. Never heard it down South——"

"Why, when a party of Indians kill a man and they can't tell which one actually done the killin' the first man to touch him with any part of his equipment gets the scalp. They carry a stick for this purpose—to touch the body. Sometimes it is an ax or a lance. They call it the coup-stick. A man told me once that it's a French word that came down from Canada. Them Frenchies have left their names all over this land. They've named rivers and hills and drinks and games o' chance and Indian tribes—Say, Ralph, you're sure playin' in hard luck losin' all that money. I can't git over that."

Peter Boyce looked with some curiosity at the younger man stretching luxuriously at length in his blankets.

"It was quite a blow at first," he said evenly. "I can't deny that at first I had figured quite a little on what I meant to do when I should get it."

"Got a girl, Ralph?"

Ralph laughed a little.

"No. Not yet—" A quick-visioned glimpse of Mary Preston gave instant denial and he flushed warmly as he rolled over. "How about a smoke, Pete?"

"It ain't worth it," said Mr. Boyce sententiously. "Tobacco smoke carries like skunk smell on a clear night. Say, Ralph—We might make a ten strike yet if we only knew where those Blue Bucket Diggings are located—What ails you?" he demanded in a most astonished tone, for Ralph Keene had sat up suddenly in his blankets and had begun to laugh, at first low and with many suppressed chuckles; then gaspingly as one who has a really good thing.

"What ails you?" demanded his astonished partner again.

The look of wonderment passed slowly from Peter Boyce's face as Ralph, after overhauling pocket after pocket finally produced a long gray woolen stocking.

"If I am not greatly mistaken," he said grinning, "we will find that we have right here the map to the Blue Bucket location that Uncle Jerry thought so much of."

With an inarticulate grunt that was half

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delight, half profanity, Peter Boyce turned the stocking inside out. In the long leg lay the same roll of foolscap paper that Ralph had seen before and the same handful of small nuggets that were unmistakable gold ore. There was light enough from the afterglow of the twilight that lingers long in those altitudes to allow both men to scrutinize the paper. Peter Boyce handed it back with a grunt that might have meant anything.

"Euchred again, by the Pink-toed Mormon Prophet of the Great Salt Lake——"

Ralph took the paper and examined it carefully. It was simply a double sheet of common foolscap, greasy and dirty beyond belief, and on it, lacquered with dirt and grease from a hundred camp-fires were several lines. At the bottom of the sheet was a small star in roughly lined quadrangle from which a line was drawn. It bore the screed: "North 50 West 1200." From the outer end of this line another led off to the right which was marked, "N 80 East 1500 to a tree," and on the third was written, "Down to crick to chimbly rock."

Ralph read it over a second time and folded it up and put it in his pocket.

"All of which is as clear as Missouri river mud. We will assume that this is the map; that it is absolutely correct and that it leads to diggings that are worth to us ten million dollars—Where is the starting point? Where is the point that is marked with a star on the paper? Maybe Mrs. Clarke knew it. Maybe my uncle knew it. Whoever knew it, it certainly is neither one of us. Funny, ain't it?"

Mr. Boyce nodded gloomily.

"It's awful laughable," he said slowly. "It's almost as ridiculous as an earache."

"The chimney rock on the creek ought not to be hard to find," said Ralph reflectively.

"Oh, no! There can't be any difficulty about a little thing like that. Shall we start on the Delaware river or the Rio Grande? All rivers are alike to us. All we want is a chimney rock——"

"WAIT a minute, Pete. You're as bad as I am. Let's do some common sense trailin'. This Mrs. Clarke was sort of half-crazy, so people said. They said that she has been half-witted at times ever since the days when the Indians attacked the wagon-train that she was with and killed her two grand-children before her eyes. I have heard her talk about it and she's as crazy as a loon. She had this map. Where would this map naturally begin?"

"How in —— would I know?" inquired Mr. Boyce with some show of reason. "I ain't a mind reader."

"It would start at the place where she was last sane, of course. That will be the place where the wagon-train was attacked by the Indians. If we could find that place we would know where the map starts but——"

"Startin' from nowhere we get nowhere," mumbled Mr. Boyce. "Let's get some sleep."

They huddled down in their blankets, for the night was cold, and were soon asleep.

That was the first of many camps. Breaking camp at daylight they would ride leisurely enough to the top of the first rise from which, Indian fashion, they would lay their course in a general westerly direction. picking some far peak or saddle as the goal of their day's march. Then very carefully following each swale or little valley they moved from place to place always seeking all the cover that they could find as they moved from ridge to ridge.

They rarely camped near water. They examined with expert eyes every stick of wood that they gathered for fuel. They even pulled the shoes from their horses' feet and packed the nail holes full of soft mud so that Indian eyes should see no difference between the strange prints and the marks left by the feet of their own ponies.

They crossed the headwaters of the Belle Fourche and the Powder rivers and plodded along for days by the base of the mountain barrier of the Big Horn mountains whose craggy masses blocked out the Western sky.

"I've got a stiff neck already from *tryin'* to look up to the top of them hills," complained Mr. Boyce. "If them hills was rolled out flat they'd make a good-sized state."

"That would flatten out all the game too. I wonder how high they are?"

"Game? There ain't no game in them mountains. Twenty years ago Jim Beckworth told me that he tried to cross those hills. I asked him what kind of a trip he had and he told me that he like to died. There was a lot of snow in the mountains that year and his two ponies froze to death. He said that he had to depend on his rifle

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for food and that he came near passin' out."

"No game you say?"

"Neither hair nor hide they say. The mountains are too high. Jim said that there was some game in the foot-hills but that for five days he was lost in the higher peaks where he was lookin' for a pass. The only livin' thing that he saw was a kind of a bird that he shot. He said he saw its shadow as it was flyin' above a snow cloud and he took a pot-shot at it. It pitched in a snow drift and when he went to pick it up it came near skeerin' him to death——"

Like all good narrators Mr. Boyce paused for the expected question.

"What was it?" Like all men, Ralph was intensely interested in stories of queer animals and long shots.

"— it was just a baby's head with a couple of wings hitched on to it. That was all——"

"A baby's head—with wings—What are are you talking about, Pete?"

Mr. Boyce nodded his head gravely as one who has considered the question from every possible angle.

"That's what it was," he said gravely. "Jim said that when he seen it he knowed right away what it was. He had seen some pictures of 'em when he was a boy. It was one of them cherubim what got to flyin' a bit too low and got lost in the snow-storm. Jim never got over shootin' it. He was afeard it would be held against him."

"You old liar. You had me sittin' up with your confounded story. Darn it all! The ponies have strayed away again Pete——"

"Of course they have. Darn 'em!" Mr. Boyce took a long look down the valley. His own pony hopping around with the short kangaroo-like jumps of hobbled animals was the only pony in sight. He looked up the valley; then down.

"You get the packs made up, son, while I get the ponies. I wish we had hobbled all of 'em. There's no tellin' how far away they may have gone. Likely they'll be down near the water."

He was gone an hour during which time Ralph stowed the packs and settled everything for their leaving and then waited patiently till the low thunder of the returning hoofs told him that the ponies were coming.

"You got them did you?" he hailed Peter Boyce joyfully. "I feared they'd get away."

"Get them? Of course I got 'em. They couldn't get away. Why, son, they was afoot while I was a horse-back. Swing the packs."

"Which way to-day, Pete?"

"Hit to the northwest. I want to keep out of that country."

He pointed vaguely to the great stretch of country that is watered by the Rosebud and the Powder rivers. They got their ponies on the trail and pushed their way northwestward ignorant of the great events that even then were shaping in that wonderland that lay a short two hundred miles to their right front.

They camped that night on a bare spur that ran out from the great main range exactly as a man's thumb thrusts out from his extended hand.

CHAPTER XII

THE travel for the first ten days seemed easy compared with that which they now experienced. The streams in the great northwest are at their highest when the snow melts suddenly under the hot suns of the late Spring. The water in those streams rarely flows with the slow, steady current of eastern rivers but generally with the mad rush of an avalanche. This keeps up till the snow is all melted and the hill-slopes are bone dry when the long Summer drought intervenes.

A stream in spate may remain so for day still the snow is all melted and during this time it is impassable. Many streams heading in the Big Horn Mountains, tiny enough at their inception, become dangerous obstacles to travelers. Unfordable, they have to be headed for few dare to risk the roaring fords when their horses are weakened from long travel with only grass for forage.

Peter Boyce and Ralph literally felt their way for the next ten days, sometimes making a scant seven miles as a day's march, dodging creeks, turning hill-shoulders, clinging at times to precipitous hill-sides where a slip meant death on the great boulders that were massed below them.

"If I had knowed what we was gettin' into I don't believe I'd have taken this route," panted Peter Boyce sitting slowly down on a great rock. "My shoes are worn

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out. My clothes are gone—Why, man! I don't hardly dare to git up right quick for fear of fallin' through the seat of my pants. How about you?"

Ralph grinned agreement. He was in the same plight. One can not live long as they had lived and expect cloth and leather to hold together. At last the day came when they passed around the head-waters of the Little Big Horn; the Greasy Grass river of the Sioux, turned the great, rocky shoulder of that most inhospitable range of mountains and for the first time in many days set their faces to the southwest.

"Fifty miles more and we should be in sight of the Oregon trail or my guess is wrong," grunted Peter Boyce. "Lord! But it will have been a big hike——"

They were squatting over their tiny fire-trench wherein Ralph had built a fire of buffalo chips to cook their supper. They had made camp early as they always did to give the ponies ample time to graze. Peter Boyce rose, straightened up and gazed off toward the west.

"What's the matter?" asked Ralph quickly, reaching automatically for his rifle.

"Nothin' alarmin'. It's just a bunch of prong-horns, but we need fresh meat. Ever shoot one?"

"No. I've shot almost everything else but I could never get close enough to antelopes. Are you goin' to try to run 'em down on those jaded ponies?"

"Run nothin' down—" Mr. Boyce's tone was scornful. "Everything is in knowin' how to do a thing. Hand me 'The Bible' "—Mr. Boyce's pet name for his rifle.

"Watch now and you'll learn somethin'."

The old man moved slowly to the top of the ridge where he calmly laid himself down in the grass upon his back.

"He surely is not fool enough to shoot at a moving antelope at five hundred yards."

Peter Boyce had no intention of wasting a shot. He calmly stretched himself out in the sunlight, raised his feet in the air and waited. He well knew what would happen.

There were four antelope in that bunch; a buck and three does. The strange smell of the fire drove them off; the sight of Peter Boyce's feet as that pair of Number Tens wriggled over the top of the low bushes brought them back, for of all animals except man the prong-horn has the most curiosity. Nothing is too unusual to be investigated by him. When they saw those feet they halted almost in mid-leap and came back at a trot. Still those feet shook and waved as Peter Boyce, on the verge of an apoplectic fit tempted them on. The buck came on, stamping and whistling every few yards. Suddenly he checked.

He would come no farther. At that moment the heavy rifle aimed between the upraised feet, flashed and roared and the buck crashed to earth. Instantly the does were off and away and were beyond the horizon by the time Peter Boyce had got to his kill. Ralph saw him bend over to cut the animal's throat. Then he rose to his feet and motioned to his partner.

"Come here a minute, boy," he called. "I want to show you somethin'——"

Ralph picked up his rifle and joined him where he stood at gaze looking steadily down into the little valley at his feet. For five hundred yards the land sloped away evenly to the southwest where a tiny creek meandered northwestward. Beyond that creek the land rose again in swale on swale of grassland rich with flowers.

"What's bitin' you now, Pete? Oh—I see——"

For Peter Boyce's hand was pointing to a distant spot in the foreground where a heap of stones formed a little pyramid among the grasses.

"White men done it of course! Indians only heap stones to show a fork in the trail and there's no trail at all here. Them stones never piled themselves there. Let's go down and see."

DOWN they went to find that the little stone pile stood in the very center of a rough square that was marked by a line of rudely built embankments perhaps a foot in height. That bank was not continuous but looked like a line of prairie-dog burrows and hills about forty yards on a side. The two men stood for a while wondering; then Peter Boyce walking forward stumbled and almost fell. When he clambered to his feet again, cursing genially, he bent to pick from the grass the object that had tripped him. It was an old wagon-tire.

"What do you make of it, Pete?"

Ralph was openly astonished; so was Peter Boyce who stood passing the worn-out tire through his hands.

"Heaven knows! It's what was left of a wagon that seems to have been headed for

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Fort Bridger. That was away off to the southwest of where we are now. Jim Bridger built it or bought it and it was the open door to the Mormon country till Brigham Young shut that Mormon door in the face of the Gentiles an' started the Mormon war of 'Fifty-five. That's a grave, Ralph—" he pointed to the rock pile—"and those—" his moving finger ran the line of the burrows. "Those are rifle pits—What ails you?"

"Just a minute, Pete. I want to get something. Ralph was running quickly toward the packs and the ponies.

He was back in a monent riding his own pony and leading Pete's horse and he was carrying the roll of foolscap paper that Mrs. Clarke had given him.

"It may be just fool notions," he shouted. "It may not be the place at all. If it is, then it's plain fool's luck, but don't you see? Here's the square that the map shows—" he pointed to the rough outline of the square marked by the tiny hillocks. "Here is certainly where a wagon-train was held up. They must have had a fight here. I'm just going to see if this place could be the startin' place of our map."

"I never thought of that—" Peter Boyce was all excitement at once. "Go ahead. The paper said twelve hundred paces. What was the compass bearin'?"

"North fifty, west; but we've got to conside the yearly shifting of the line and the yearly variation. That was thirty years ago. We'll call it a half degree variation for each year—That'll be roughly about sixteen degrees off the reading or north thirty-six, west—Twelve hundred paces——"

He rode slowly forward along the line that he had selected, estimating his distances as he rode; then he turned to his right front and rode up the hill. When Peter Boyce came up to him he found him sitting on his pony under a tree and he was pale with excitement.

"This must be the tree that the map spoke of at the end of the second course, Pete. I'm beginning to believe that this is the place. Now it says—'due north to the creek'—and yonder lies the creek in the bottom——"

By this time Peter Boyce had caught the fever from his partner. They walked their horses down the slope toward the tiny creek that ran down that valley on its way to join the Big Horn.

"Yonder—" his voice was choked with excitement that he made no effort to conceal—"yonder is the chimney rock, too, Pete—" He pointed to a small white rock shaped like a chimney that stood on the far bank of the creek two hundred yards from where they stood.

"Let's have a try here anyway. You make camp while I get the fryin' pan. I'll soon see what there is here."

When Ralph started back to camp, Peter Boyce was down on his knees in the sand of the stream-bed. He filled the big frying pan with water and gravel and sifted it gently moving it in a circle, throwing out a little water and gravel with each movement. Panning gold is a very simple process. It can be done very satisfactorily with a frying-pan. Being heavier than dirt the gold sinks to the bottom of the pan and stays there.

"Well?" said Ralph suggestively when Peter joined him a little later.

"Oh, I got color but it wasn't enough to give me heart-failure. It may be pretty good if we take the time to work it. Of course we'll have to go clear down to the bed rock to get the real deposit that may be there. The gold that may have been here will have sifted down to bed rock. Nothin' but rock will stop it. Let's camp here for a while. We need a rest and we 're not in any hurry now. Here 're plenty of wood an' grass an' water and lots of game. We can't do any better."

"All right. That suits me."

The next day they made a permanent camp. They built a lean-to of light cottonwood logs that they covered with earth and banked at the ends and then they set to work in earnest on those placer workings down in the creek bed. They selected a place below a great riffle where the stream fell over a flat rock and they began to dig and with each foot that they went their prospects looked brighter and brighter. Twice they found small pockets that were filled with small nuggets and coarse gold that set their hearts to beating wildly, for men never become quite accustomed to the sight of free gold in large quantities.

EACH day they cleaned up in the rough riffles that they made from small cottonwood trees and day by day their hoardings grew. They put all that they got in skin bags that they made

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from the hides of animals they killed for food. Grain by grain, spoonful by spoonful they hoarded their find till finally when they had toiled unceasingly for eleven days, working at the hole that was to take them down to the bed rock, Peter Boyce was heard to give a great whoop of delight. Ralph recognized the note of success in it and came running to him in the hole where he found his partner executing a *pas seul* among the stones.

"You haven't gone crazy have you, Pete? What ails you?"

"Son—" old Peter Boyce looked up grinning— "I ain't got my gold harp an' halo or my gold crown yet but there's enough gold in sight here for me to order 'em from San Francisco all right when we get a chance. Look there will you——"

He pointed to a little heap of nuggets and coarse gold and dust that was still wet that he had placed upon his coat on the creek-bank.

"We've got it! We've got it, I tell you! We may not be able to go back to Deadwood to spend it but who in —— wants to go back to Deadwood when we've got all the rest of the world open to us. I'm content to see the Western Coast towns; to own a house and a good horse and to be able to have canned peaches three times a day every day if I want 'em. We sure have had one —— of a time gettin' here. I don't believe even them Forty-Niners had a harder time. One thing is certain. Nobody will ever have a trip like ours again."

Peter Boyce was wrong. Other people had found that trip just as difficult and they were not far away. To follow is often more difficult than it is to lead.

WHEN Nathan Ives and his little party left Deadwood they were about eighteen hours behind the men they sought. Ives was the directing spirit of the party and they all, even Mary Preston, looked to him to a certain extent for instructions, if not for actual leadership. Both Bates and Preston were prospectors with all of the almost uncanny sense of direction that is a prospector's eighth sense that makes it impossible for them to lose themselves. Set down in —— they would at once have begun an optimistic search for water and an iceberg and they would probably have found both or induced some friend of theirs to grub-stake them till they had found it.

The land to the west was practically unknown and not one of the little party had ever been five miles west of Deadwood, but they had common sense to guide them and common sense is an excellent adviser.

"They've got to have water every night," growled Bates, "and they must have grass fer their stock. All right! Then it's an immortal cinch that they've got to travel along the bottoms where grass and water is. They'll have to graze their ponies so they can't travel after noon very much. If they do, the horses won't have time to eat. They know that they're movin' through Indian country so they'll keep under all the cover that they kin. I wish I knowd the general run of the map that they've got. There's the beginnin' of their trail now——"

It was not much. To an inexperienced eye it would have told nothing. It was simply a scarred hoof-slide where one of the pack-ponies had blundered and slid in the loose shale of the hill-side, but it was enough to give direction.

Standing on the top of the ridge, Bates and Preston scanned the broad expanse of the land to the west. There were two low places in that long line of hills that formed their horizon and either of them might be a pass. They quested for a full hour in the valley before they found more "sign" that told them which of the low places the refugees had headed for. They found that "sign" in a cropped bush where a pack-pony had snatched a mouthful of the early blossoms. After that from time to time they saw "droppings" from the ponies; at the water-holes they of course found the fresh trail, but there ensued whole days of doubt as to whether they were really on the right track of the men they sought.

Green men would have lost that trail beyond recovery on the first day. When they reached the place where Peter Boyce had cannily stripped the shoes from their horses' feet there was a long check. It was caused by the fact that the bare-footed ponies of the pursued had "milled" around in the short grass in the sheer joy of having their feet stripped of those heavy iron shoes so that two shod ponies had come into camp and that a dozen unshod horses had stood there.

"Maybe a bunch of Indians has picked them up," said Ives hopefully. He would have given much to know that that had happened. To Nathan Ives the finding of the

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Blue Bucket was a distinct side-issue compared with the sudden death of Ralph Keene. One was a speculation. The other was an assured investment.

"No. Here it is—I've got it——" Bates bent low over the tracks in the soft ground near the spring. "They stripped off the shoes from their ponies here so they wouldn't show shod tracks."

"How do you know that?" asked the wondering Mary.

Bates grunted but he showed her, not uncivilly, where Ralph's pony had stood while the rider mounted.

"See them foot-prints of the man. See where he was standing on the left side of the pony. No Indian ever gets on a horse from the left side. A white man mounts from the left side. An Indian from the right. There goes the trail. See——"

He pointed very positively to the long sweep of country on which the girl could find no sign that showed the passage of any living thing. A white man can trail as well as an Indian when he has once learned to use his eyes and his powers of deduction and both Bates and Preston had learned both in the hard school of dire necessity. In times past their lives had depended on it.

They lost time of course, for it is not only at sea that a stern chase becomes a long chase. They lost that trail time and again and they blundered over it frequently so that while they were but eighteen hours behind their goal when they started, that time had stretched out into eleven days, but they stuck to the trail with a dogged persistence that was worthy of a better cause.

WHEN the rugged line of the Big Horn mountains hove up in their immediate front, a seemingly impassible barrier, Iron-hook Bates voiced his deep disapproval.

"Darn 'em! They ain't got the faintest notion of where they're goin' er why. They're just like a coyote that's been chased out of his own country. Look where the trail leads to, will you——"

His arm swept to the dark northwest where the land spread out in line after line of grass-crowned ridges with a hint of mountains behind them.

"They must know where they're goin'. They've got that map," growled Preston. "They're on the track of some mighty rich diggin's and where they can go we can follow, I reckon."

So it happened that they too turned the craggy northern shoulder of that range of mountains and found again the trail that they feared they had lost beyond all hope of recovery. They found it in an indisputable sign—in two empty copper cartridge shells Ralph had ejected from his rifle never suspecting any one would see them.

"Let's camp here," growled Preston. "Here's a fine pocket in the hills for a camp and the ridges are too far away for rifle fire from any wanderin' Indians. Good wood an' water an' grass, too, for a wonder. I sure am tired of cookin' over a buffalo chip smolder. Come on, Bates. Let's see if we can't coax some trout outen that creek. Let Mary an' Ives make the fire and see about supper. Build a good fire for once," he said lightly to Ives. "We may as well be warm for all of one night anyway. There's no one to see us."

They made their fire; it was almost a conflagration, the one unwise thing that they had done since they had dropped the wall of the Black Hills behind them. That column of black smoke sucking up above the line of the brush where they had made their camp caught the always open eye of Peter Boyce as he lay among the rocks examining his ore-samples a half mile away. His steady staring away to the line of the horizon attracted the attention of his partner.

"What's the matter, Pete? Look here a minute——"

"I *am* lookin'——"

An indefinable undercurrent of something in the old man's voice made Ralph look sharply at him. Peter Boyce rose to his knees and brushed the dirt from his hands.

"Don't you see that edgin' of black smoke over the top of that rise?"

Sure enough, rising from the tangle of willows and aspen scrub that filled the creek bottom, a thin trickle of heavy black smoke was slowly rising from the gully a short half mile away from where they sat. Peter Boyce sat like a statue eyeing that smoke for a long minute.

"You stay here," he said suddenly to Ralph. "Ive got to look into that. If that's an Indian fire, it's a signal. It may be that a small party has sighted us and is callin' for help."

"Do you think they've seen us, Pete?"

"That's exactly what I mean to find out.

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You stay here and pack everything for us so we can move as soon as I get back, if we have to. Keep my pony with you. I can do it better afoot. I'll come back by way of the scrub. Look out for the ponies. They'll whinny if the wind brings the smell of other horses to 'em. If they do that grab the nose of the first that tries it and squeeze it hard. That'll stop him. Tie their heads down to their knees. The smell of smoke carries high. If I'm not back in an hour, start to go down the draw, but leave my pony here for me."

Ralph set about his work in silence. He realized that in work of this kind he would be more of a hindrance than a help to his partner and they must find out the meaning of that smoke. In twenty minutes he had packed everything, tied the ponies together by the heads and had crawled out upon the ridge above the camp where he lay with ready rifle waiting for some sign from Peter Boyce.

No sign came!

Dropping his heavy "Bible" to the "trail" the old prospector had drifted into the low scrub as silently as a wind-blown shadow.

"War-parties don't camp like that," he reflected. "I'll just skirt the edge of the hills and come in on 'em from the northeast. If they're trailin' us they won't be lookin' for any one to come in from that direction."

It was killing work trailing through that tangled scrub that was barely high enough to cover him to the shoulders. At times he had to crawl upon his belly to cross a bare spot where a hopeful prairie dog had located a claim. Foot by foot, yard by yard, he crept through the matted undergrowth of aspens and willows till he came to the far edge of the brush where the reek of the smoking fire almost set him to coughing.

To his left the sloping ground formed a small pocket, the lips of which were fringed with low bushes. In the center of that pocket a half dozen giant cottonwood trees shot high in air and from the very middle of that clump he heard the low rumble of a deep voice. Closer and closer he crept on his belly up the slope, afraid to show his head over the rise yet knowing that he must raise his head for a good look that would tell him who these men were. Indian or white man? Savage or Christian? Indians certainly, but were they hostiles? What tribe? Were their women with them? Where were their ponies corraled and how many?"

To answer those questions he must look over that crest. Suddenly the answer came, for, clear and distinct, as the wind lulled, he heard the words:

"You —— ——! How was I to know that I was playin' with a —— ——. What in —— did you hold that ace up fer?"

Peter Boyce backed painfully down that slope that he had come up so carefully a while before.

"Well," he muttered gratefully: "That's settled anyway. Thank God! They're Christians!"

HE SCRAMBLED back again and took a long look. There on the slope of the pocket below him, facing each other across a dirty blanket sat Tom Preston and Iron-hook Bates playing euchre with a pack of soiled cards. Still farther below them he could see two other figures moving in and out among the bushes. Presently as he watched, one figure resolved itself into Mary Preston. Then there was the sound of a man rushing through the scrub and Doctor Ives came running up the ridge toward the gamblers.

"Look! Look there!" he panted heavily pointing over the low land to the south where Peter Boyce's camp lay.

Tom Preston sprang to his feet scattering his cards and looked, but first of all he looked at the fire that Ives and Mary had built.

"My Lord!" he shouted angrily. "Can't you be trusted to do even a little thing like buildin' a fire. Look, will you! Black smoke rising like we're in mournin' for some body—An' we likely will be if there're any hostiles around—Tellin' every Indian in the country that we're his meat if he wants us—to say nothin' of givin' warnin' to the men we've come here to get——"

Peter Boyce nodded his head as one who has received confirmatory evidence.

"That's what I thought," he growled.

Ives began an angry reply but Preston was looking over his head away to the southwest. There was an intangible drumming in their ears that seemed to come from the very ground itself. It sounded as a beehive sounds when one places his hand on the landing board at swarming time. There was an impalpable humming and along with it a vibration that suggested untold danger.

The air was full of it; a heavy droning rumble that pervaded all space; shaking the

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very earth, that seemed to echo and re-echo, rising and falling in swelling and dying waves of sound like the roaring of far off surf on sandy beaches. Sudden realization came to Tom Preston. He had heard it before.

"By ——" he shouted hoarsely breaking into a run for the ponies standing hobbled by the fire. "Get the ponies loose and herd 'em down into the creek where the banks will protect them. Fire the dry grass along the bank there! It's a buffalo herd. We're right in the track of a stampedin' herd——"

Peter Boyce backed down that slope quicker than he had ever come up it and he scuttled away like a praire dog for his own camp. If it were possible to do it, he and Ralph must clear the front of that herd. Their camp was squarely in the track of it.

CHAPTER XIII

BREATHLESS, panting, running as though his very life depended on his speed, old Peter Boyce tore down the slope and then headed up the far hill-side running like a coyote before hounds. Ralph stared hard at him as he dashed into camp, incoherent from breathlessness.

"Get to the ponies," he wheezed. "Quick I say—look——"

The fore-runners of that stampeding herd were already almost upon them. Great flocks of birds trampled out of the covers darkened the sky; rabbits and coyotes loping out of the tall grass as though before a prairie fire; here and there a bunch of prong-horns was trying to cut across the front of that mighty herd that was driving down upon them in a whirling mass of dust and heated air and bellowing accompanied by a great gust of the raw animal smell that drives crazy both men and horses.

"It's the biggest herd I've even seen, son, and they're stampedin' right! Get to your pony quick! We've got to light out——"

They flung into saddle. The very tenseness of the air told Ralph more clearly than any words could have told that the place was fraught with danger. Peter Boyce cast a knowing glance to right and left of them; then he shook his head. A half-hour earlier there might have been a chance to clear the front of that moving mass but not now. It stretched out to right and left of them in a vast mass of oncoming thousands not a solid line but a line of galloping thousands in loosely knit bunches.

Column after column of cows driven crazy by the weight behind them, head carried low, cows in front with tossing horns, the fighting front of fire-eyed frightened bulls, the whole mass driven frantic by the thousands behind them; of calves hustled along by sheer crowd momentum; of bulls and cows trampling, trampling, trampling now over grass and little hillocks and knolls that a moment before had been covered with brush and low-growing bright green madrono, but that, when the herd had passed, were trampled out of existence. Over bushes and small trees they went, even plunging into and over the weaker members of the herd leaving not a vestige of any living thing to mark their passage.

"Give your pony the spur. The pack ponies'll keep up. They've got to come. Come on, for God's sake! Keep hold of your pony's head. If he stumbles they'll be on top of you. A foot in a prairie dog hole means a life now——"

"Can we clear them—" Ralph heard himself asking the question as though in a dream.

Peter Boyce's reply astonished him.

"I'm not botherin' about the herd. We can't clear the front of 'em but we can keep ahead of them. What's botherin' me is—what is there behind them? What started this herd to stampedin'——"

"What difference does that make? Anything will start a stampede——"

"With cows, not with buffalo. The sight of a white man or an Indian will do it, and I'm guessin' it's—Indians—Say, Ralph—You know that smoke that I went to investigate?"

"Yes. What was it? Indians?"

"Worse'n that. There was no time to tell you before but the men who made that fire was that man Preston and Ives and Iron-hook Bates and they've got with 'em that girl—Miss Preston——"

"What?" Ralph's voice rose to a shriek that was beaten to a whisper by the roar of the galloping thousands close upon their heels. "You're crazy, Pete!"

"Maybe. All the same that's who was in that camp. They had trailed us of course. I told you we'd be followed, but I didn't think there was a man in the Deadwood diggin's could do a job like that. No need to worry though. This business will fix

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'em. They will be driven out of the country and the herd will trample out all our trail sign—Keep to the west, boy! Darn it all! They're crowdin' us to the north just where we didn't want to go."

While they talked they galloped. Their ponies terrified at first by the oncoming surge of the frenzied bulls rushed crazy-headed at bank and slope and the pack-ponies catching the fever of flight led the mad ride. Right across the river they went, tripping over rocks, sliding down the steep bank, blundering through the shallows, the whole stream a welter of spume and sand and tossing heads and fiery-eyed shaggy monsters as dangerous in their thousands as the Indians that they feared.

More than once Peter Boyce cast covetous glances over his shoulder at the craggy masses of the mountains looming to his right flank. If they could but have managed to get to those hills they could have taken refuge among the rocks and watched that herd go by, but they had been caught in the very vortex of the storm and were being whirled steadily northward.

He knew that there were passes to the north through which they could eventually make their way to the Coast once they should be clear of this herd. He knew that Lewis and Clark, Parkman and Davis had got through, and so would they get through; but he also knew that the Indian tribes to the northeast of the Oregon trail had been aroused to frenzy by the incursions of the white man and that every mile that they went into those lands meant additional danger for them.

The running pace was not especially rapid, perhaps fifteen miles an hour, but the ungainly beasts showed no signs of tiring. He knew that when a herd moved of its own volition it moved slowly, eating out the country as it moved. That the animals were galloping could mean but one thing—they had been started from their bedding grounds by a hunting party of Indians who were very probably driving the herd to a general destruction by driving it over a convenient precipice, a process called a "*pis-kun*" by the Indians.

MILE after mile they put behind them. The pace showed no sign of abatement. The herd showed no sign of exhaustion. If an animal tired out, it fell and was simply trampled out of existence and another took its place. Galloping, galloping, galloping in an effort to keep ahead of that surging front of lowered heads and tossing horns they spurred the now frightened ponies. Suddenly Ralph uttered a heart-felt oath as one of the pack-ponies thrust his fore-foot into a gopher hole, turned a complete somersault and went down—and he was a short one hundred yards in the very front of that hurtling avalanche. Instantly Peter Boyce flung up his hand.

"Split 'em," he shouted, his voice sounding shrilly above the roar of the oncoming masses. "If we lose our stuff we'll die anyway. Fire the dry grass while I split the herd! Throw your pony before he runs away."

In a frenzy of excitement Ralph picked up his pony's near fore-foot, pulled his head to the right and jerked on the right rein. Instantly the pony crashed to earth and Ralph thrust a match into the heart of a bunch of dry "blue stem" grass. It flared and flamed and the fire jumped to another bunch and was off down wind with the speed of a running horse.

Quick as Ralph had been, Peter Boyce was even quicker. He threw himself from the saddle, seized his heavy rifle and sent shot after shot into the very faces of the maddened bulls. The first shot, crashing through the head brought a giant bull to his knees. He fell almost at Peter Boyce's feet, rolling over and over before he finally straightened out and lay still. Instantly another bull, stumbling over the carcass of the first was shot by Ralph and a four-foot barrier of warm flesh lay between them and the hurtling mass.

Shot after shot went home for they were too close to miss and both rifles sent the bullets clear through the charging buffaloes. Those in front could not avoid that fire, pressed on as they were by the weight of the herd behind them and those behind could not see anything to turn out for—till it was too late. The rifles cracked and roared till the dead bodies formed a barrier that no living animal could jump, behind which the two men stood watching to see what would happen.

The mass instantly divided. It split into two waves, one flowing to each side of the death mound in their front. The fire in the grass swept off to the west and checked them there turning them into a

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solid mass to the east and in an hour, the two men who had been in the very center of destruction, found themselves on the western flank of the herd watching the thinning lines go by. There were no longer great bunches of maddened animals but streaming lines of tired and exhausted buffaloes, the lame, the weak, the crippled and near each little group ran eager-eyed coyotes, black wolves, gray wolves, and even the rarer and more cowardly blue wolves of the plains, all crazy for the kill. Antelopes too were there by the hundreds driving by at full gallop in the wake of the departing thousands.

"An' that's darned near my last ca't-ridge—" Peter Boyce sat down on the body of a dead bull and wiped his face on the back of a sweating hand. "I've been firin' my rifle like a boy shootin' off fire crackers on the Fourth of July—An' look at what we've got—By —— we're busted flat!"

"Pike's Peak or bust! Busted, by ——!" agreed Ralph with an attempt at a laugh that ended in a groan as he looked about him.

It was a wreck indeed. One pack-pony had broken his leg and had to be shot. The other had been flattened out over half an acre of ground and was not even recognizable as ever having been a horse. Ralph's pony had pulled loose in the exitement and had gone on his way rejoicing. He was probably in Athabasca by now if he could keep up the gait at which he started. There remained to them Peter Boyce's pony; what few belongings he had tied to his saddle; the clothes they stood in and their rifles.

"And they're not much better than so much cold iron—" Peter's tone was bitter. "I've got exactly seven ca'tridges left. How about you——?"

Ralph went through every pocket and took careful count of what he found.

"I've got nineteen," he announced.

"We'll need every one before we get through. Holy cats of Egypt! Look at that! What do you make of that——"

HE JERKED his hand straight away toward the south. Ralph stared till the strain of looking into the dust-laden sunshine blinded him. His eyes cleared and he gasped as though some one had flung a bucket of cold water in his face. There was reason for that gasp, for there, not two hundred yards away from where they stood, with tossing plumes and feathered lances, with tufted spears and painted bows, streaming over the ridge in line after line of galloping ponies; ponies black and white and bay and pintado, trampling on the heels of the retreating buffalo came a hunting party of the Sioux.

"It's the Sioux, Ralph. I was afraid of this, but I hoped that by cuttin' off to the west we would be able to keep out of the track of whoever was chasin' them—Don't shoot, man—" for Ralph's ready rifle had pitched to his shoulder—"we can't fight them. We haven't got the ammunition. We've got to face it out—There! They've seen us——"

A shrill yell from the leading warriors struck new life into their jaded ponies. Moccasined heels shot home into sweating flanks and with a chorus of yelps and shouts the four separate columns closed in on the two white men.

"Don't move a muscle," cautioned Peter Boyce between his set teeth. "They'll try to get our nerve by ridin' as close to us as they can with their spears. Stand still! Don't move a muscle for your life."

It took nerve; almost more nerve than Ralph possessed to stand immovable while a dozen blood-crazed warriors painted for the hunt, their heads and bodies smeared with blood and paint and dust, drove down upon them with their reddened lance points ready to center in the bodies of the white men if they did but move.

Ralph stood just in front of Peter Boyce, his teeth set, his heart standing still. He had made up his mind exactly as to what he meant to do. That charge might be all for effect or it might be in earnest! When those lance points should converge within three feet of him, he meant to drop upon his face under the points and to open fire with his heavy "Navy Six" keeping the last shot for himself. Of course it would mean death but he would at least have the satisfaction of killing some one before the end.

The old man read instinctively what was passing in Ralph's mind. He saw it in the back-thrown poise of the head, in the set lines of arms and shoulders and in the fingers as the knuckles whitened under the strain as his hand closed on the pistol butt.

"Steady, son," he cautioned in a low tone. "Wait till I give the word. Not till

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they git within three yards—I'll give the word——"

That word was never given for with a shrill yell the charging lines opened out to right and left and in the space between them rode a tall warrior coming on at a gallop. He was naked to the waist and the upper part of his body was painted with rings and stripes in white and red and yellow paints, peace colors. Peter Boyce noted with some relief that the *sapa*, the black that the tribe uses in war, was missing. That might mean something. Not much, it was true, but still it gave him hope. Those peace colors were somewhat belied by the short war-bow that swung in its beaded case from the man's shoulder and by the round shield of painted buffalo hide adorned at the center by a bunch of red-dyed hawk's feathers. Shields were not carried by hunting parties unless it was prepared to change its mission at any time. The man rode forward, right hand up, palm out, the peace sign the world over; but old Peter Boyce, versed in Indian ways knew well enough that that peace would only last till it would be opportune or profitable to break it. He too strode forward, his right hand stretched out.

"I'll do what I can," he groaned to Ralph. "I can talk his lingo pretty good and anyway I can make out what he's got to say."

White man and red stared each other full in the face for a moment. Then they clasped hands.

"Huh!" grunted the Indian. "Are my brothers hungry that they hunt so far from their lodges?"

"We have no lodges," said Peter Boyce. "We follow the herds for our food. The buffalo and antelope have fled toward the setting sun and we have followed them. We are on our way to the land of the Great Water beyond the mountains."

"Do the white men travel on foot? Where are your ponies?"

Peter Boyce pointed to his exhausted pony that had lain down in the grass.

"Our ponies have been killed or driven off in the stampede. We are alone——"

The next moment even Peter Boyce's iron composure was shaken for another party of warriors streamed over the southward ridge and they saw, mounted on Indian ponies in the midst of that party of raiding Sioux, the party that had trailed them out of Deadwood in the Black Hills, Ives and Tom Preston, Iron-hook Bates and Mary Preston.

Ralph uttered an oath of disbelief.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Indians paid no attention whatever to the party over the hill. Their interest was centered in their latest prisoners. The entire band gathered around the two white men, scrutinizing their arms and belongings as though they were beings from another world.

"Do the white men believe that they own this land?" The question was short and sharp and the manner in which Blue Wolf asked it left no manner of doubt in the minds of his hearers as to his attitude.

"Must Blue Wolf and his people go across the Line into the Northern Land (Canada) to find the buffalo and to keep away from the white men? What does the white man seek here?"

"I have just told you," said Mr. Boyce sharply. "When I left the lands of the white men it was because my medicine told me to come. I came west into these hills where I have lived for thirty years. Like you I follow the buffalo herds. I kill my own meat."

"And those——" Blue Wolf pointed to the Ives party. "Are these not your party?"

Peter Boyce glanced incuriously at them. Ives and the girl were frankly excited by the meeting. If Bates and Preston were astonished at the meeting they retained their self-control and did not show it.

"Are these your people?" demanded Blue Wolf again.

"We have no people. We travel alone. Blue Wolf knows that the white men like the Red, have many tribes. Let me talk with these men and I will ask them questions."

Blue Wolf waved his hand in assent and at a signal his men drew back, watching intently while Peter Boyce and Ralph walked over to the group where the other whites stood.

"Don't let them see that we know each other," he hissed through unmoving lips as he came up to them. "They're suspicious of us all right now. I'm darned sorry to see you all in this mess—especially Miss Preston. I'd be glad enough to see you two men get in a nice mess, but not

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this—darn your hide!" he grated at Ives. "Look out how you speak. There is no knowing how much English they can understand. I don't think it's much."

He shot a few hurried questions at Ives, his words fairly tumbling over each other. "How'd you get here anyway? Who put you up to trailin' us across the hills? What was it you was after?" Never heeding Ives' stammering attempts at replies, the old man turned to the Indians who were crowding close around the group and with a wave of his hand requested them to withdraw. They paid no attention to him but crowded closer. An exclamation from Ralph made the old man turn and look at him.

"What is it, boy? We're in the devil of a mess or I'm all out in my guess. These people are Uncapapa Sioux by their paint and by the cut of their moccasins. See the heavy seam along the inner edge of the sole. I can understand their talk all right but I'm afraid to ask them what they're doin' so far to the south of their own country. What's the matter, Ralph?"

"There goes their medicine man." Ralph pointed to an Indian who was picking his way to a neighboring hill-top. He was laden with a blanket that was wrapped about his head and he walked slowly.

"Aye. He's makin' medicine there to find out what they shall do with us. When he comes back, we'll hear from him. I'm bettin' that he tells somethin' that we won't like to hear."

They saw the medicine-man climb slowly to the peak of the hill where he very carefully spread upon the ground a bright red blanket, on the four corners of which he placed four buffalo skulls. In the center of the blanket he placed a flat rock on which he proceeded to light a tiny fire. When the blaze was fairly started he opened a small skin bag that was covered with bright colored glass beads that hung about his neck, took something from it and dropped it on the blaze. It flared up in a blue flame that instantly died away leaving a column of jetty smoke shooting up into the evening air.

"Bone meal," commented Mr. Boyce. "That'll be darned bad medicine for us I'm bettin'."

He turned to Blue Wolf who was standing behind him with his arms folded and a look of quiet disdain upon his painted face.

"Why do the Uncapapa hunt so far to the south? he asked.

"Does the white man see squaws with us? Does he see lodge poles and children? My people ask leave of no man where they shall hunt. All prairies are the prairies of the Uncapapas. Our lodges lie far to the north and we drive the buffalo to the line of the Yellowstone to the great *pis-kun* to take the buffalo by the thousands.

"What medicine does my brother make yonder?"

"He asks the Great Spirit what shall be done with the white men," replied Blue Wolf ominously. "Whether they shall stay here or go."

Peter Boyce was conscious of a gentle sweat that broke out in the region of his collar and trickled slowly down the back of his neck. He was very certain that Blue Wolf had already decided on his course of action and that that action would not be pleasant. That ring of painted warriors reeking with blood from their recent kill would not be satisfied with the mere buffaloes when five defenseless white men and a woman were in their power. He voiced his belief in a low tone to Ralph standing close by him. Ralph gave a sudden start. He had remembered something.

"Do you want to make a stronger medicine than they can make?" he asked a trifle breathlessly. "Do you want to impress them? If you do, we can make an impression on them that will be bigger than was made by the first gun they ever saw."

His partner looked at him commiseratingly.

"It's the sun and the excitement," he muttered to himself shaking his head. "Are you feelin' bad, boy? Buck up a bit. Something may turn up."

"Oh, I'm not dotty! Something *has* turned up already I tell you." Ralph almost laughed so sure was he. "They believe in the medicine that that old devil up yonder will tell them he has made. I've got better medicine right here. I've right in my coat pocket that bottle of capsules that I brought from Deadwood. I took it out of the pack last night and put it in my pocket I tell you—the same medicine that that —— scoundrel yonder—" he nodded at Ives— "used to kill my uncle.

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"ARE you sure you've got it?" Mr. Boyce almost gasped.

"Am I sure? I tell you I've got my hand on it right now. He thrust his hand unconcernedly into his coat pocket.

"Are you sure it will work?"

"Certainly. Wait! Ives—" He turned to face the wondering doctor. "Don't look as though I'm accusin' you of the murder that you committed. Our lives may hang on this. Pete says that that old rascal on the hill yonder is their medicine man. He has been making medicine there and will come back and tell them that his medicine says to kill us. I have the bottle of the prussic acid capsules in my pocket; the stuff that you changed on me. Remember?"

Ives nodded. The Adam's apple in his throat was pumping up and down. His nerves had gone to fiddle strings.

"If I use these capsules as I have planned, I can upset their plans I believe. If I do not do it, we haven't got a chance. It will be sure death for us. Probably by torture. I am tellin' you right now that unless you tell these people exactly what took place back there in my uncle's house in Deadwood; exactly how Jerry Lane died, I will not use one of them. Do you understand?"

Ives nodded dully. He was almost past speech.

"Speak up then! By —— I mean what I say! You know and I know how Jerry Lane died. Tell them—her, I mean."

He motioned imperceptibly toward Mary Preston who stood watching them, her eyes like stars.

"Tell her how that prussic acid came to be in the wrong bottle. It's your death by torture, if you don't tell."

The sweat was standing in great drops on Ralph Keene's face as he spoke. Would Nathan Ives confess? Would he, Ralph, have the nerve to destroy those precious capsules without using them if the real murderer did not confess?

Peter Boyce asked himself the question a score of times in the twenty seconds that it took for Ives to make up his mind. This was strength that he had never thought to see. Could it be possible that Ralph meant what he said?

"I've got the bottle in my hand and the cork is out. In one minute if you have not answered I will scatter those capsules over the ground so that no man can recover them. If you tell the truth I can save every one of us. Answer——"

"Keep—keep enough of them to give each of us one," Ives faltered. "If you have them they will save us from the torture."

"Not one except for Miss Preston, Peter Boyce, and for me. The rest of you can go to —— as far as I'm concerned. What's it to be? Quick, man!"

Tom Preston and Iron-hook Bates had caught the words and the by-play and they were on him in an instant.

"Tell him, doc. Talk an' talk quick! Don't you see he means every word he says? You know what Sioux torture is."

Ives did know. In times past he had seen two men who had undergone it. One of them had lived, a broken wreck who had dragged out a miserable existence for several years in torment. He licked his dry lips and looked about him like a trapped animal.

"All right," he said in desperation. "No law runs west of the Frontier. You can't hold me responsible. I did it—I changed the bottles——"

"But how man? How——'

Ives hesitated. The sight of the medicine-man on the hill packing up his effects quickened him. He spoke with feverish haste.

"—I drew off the nitrate of amyl from some of the capsules and filled them with the prussic acid. Then I changed the labels —— you! This confession is made under duress. It's not worth a cent in law and you know it," he added turning sharply on Ralph.

Ralph drew his breath hard and looked squarely in Ives' eyes. There was contempt unutterable in that look and Ives writhed under it.

"And let me be blamed for the whole thing! Not only that but you tried to incite the mob to take a hand! Oh, I know all about it! Let me tell you right here, Ives, that this affair is not settled by your confession that clears me. You know what the price of a life is, don't you? Well—you'll pay. It may not be right now but—you'll pay!" He turned to the perturbed Peter Boyce. "Go ahead, Pete! Make your play. Ives, will these capsules still kill?"

"Try one and see," growled Ives turning away with a shrug of his shoulders. "One of 'em will kill an elephant."

He had recovered his self-control but he

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could not help noticing that even Ironhook Bates and Tom Preston had shrunk from him. They had honestly believed Ives' story that he had told them a dozen times.

PETER BOYCE did not delay an instant. He had already delayed too long. He drew himself up and with an air of confidence spoke to the watching Blue Wolf.

"Why does your medicine-man waste his time on weak medicine on the hill yonder? It will not help him against the strong medicine that my young man can make." He pointed to Ralph.

"Your medicine is not strong enough to take you out of the strong hands of the Dakotas," quoth Blue Wolf sententiously.

Peter Boyce laughed frankly. There was no mirth in that laugh except for its sound. Then he shook a warning finger under the nose of the chief.

"Walk lightly on a strange trail. My young man has made medicine that can take us out of the hands of the Dakotas when we choose to go. Blue Wolf can not tell a real medicine man when he sees one. He should open his eyes and look for worms.* Before your medicine man could reach you, my young man could blow upon you and kill every warrior of your party."

"With a rifle?" Blue Wolf smiled incredulously.

"With his hands. Wait. Words do not show. I will show you and you will see that I do not speak with a forked tongue. Choose a horse that you can spare."

Still unbelieving, Blue Wolf called a warrior who promptly led inside the waiting ring, Peter Boyce's own pony, the only horse that had remained to them. The old prospector gave an unhappy grunt.

"Darnation take it! Pie-biter, you're playin' in derned hard luck but it's got to be you or us this show-down. Give him the capsule, Ralph, and do it so they can't see you puttin' it in his mouth. Make all the show of it that you can——"

"Break the capsule as you put it in his mouth," said Ives in a low tone. "It will kill him instantly."

"If it don't, they'll get us," ejaculated Mr. Boyce with sharp emphasis.

Ralph moved forward as the warrior led the pony up to the group. Peter Boyce suddenly stopped him with upraised hand.

"Let Blue Wolf move his warriors back," he said shortly. "I would not have my medicine work harm to a warrior of the Dakotas—unless I could git the whole —— bunch," he muttered under his breath.

Half unbelieving, wholly doubting, the warriors gave way, backing away from the ring as though in the presence of sudden death. Ralph moved forward toward the horse. When he reached him, he stopped and picked a bunch of dry grass. He took it in his left hand and very ostentatiously blew his breath upon it three times. Then he waved the grass across his face and made some signs over it with the right hand while he muttered a whole-hearted curse upon all the Dakotas that Blue Wolf undoubtedly mistook for an incantation. As he chanted, he moved forward toward the horse. The warriors, intent on watching developments, did not notice the slow withdrawal of the ready right hand from the coat pocket. Certainly they did not see the tiny yellow capsule that nested for a brief second in his palm before he thrust it grass and all into the willing, eager mouth of the expectant pony.

That grass barely reached his muzzle when the horse made a sudden snatch for it. As he gave it, Ralph squeezed the capsule till he felt it crack. The next second with a visible stiffening of every muscle, the horse sank to the ground with a sound that was half grunt, half groan.

He was stone dead.

A sigh of relief ran around the ring of waiting warriors and they swayed back from Ralph as poplars strain away from a high wind.

"Have I spoken the truth? Hold the grass out to them," said Peter Boyce in a fierce whisper.

Ralph snatched another bunch of grass from the ground and advanced toward Blue Wolf. He shrank back visibly.

"Your tongue is not forked. Never have I seen such medicine. There is none like it in all our tribes."

"Shall my young man show the medicine on one of your young men who do not believe?" It was evident that Peter Boyce was thoroughly enjoying his brief supremacy.

"Do not waste good medicine on our poor bodies. Save it for the full tribe. We drive the buffalo north to the great *pis-kun* of

*i.e., study objects close at hand.

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the villages west of the Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn). My brothers will travel on an open path."

He spoke sharply to a young man who threw himself upon a pony and galloped up the hill where the medicine man still stood. A word brought him down from the rocky knoll, loaded with his effects. Another quick motion of the chief's hand drew the men together. Two others brought up some of the led ponies to which Peter Boyce and Ralph quickly transfered their saddles and in twenty minutes the long lines of the paint-bedizened warriors with their six prisoners, were riding northward in the track of the departing herd.

Ralph urged his pony forward till he rode by Mary's side.

"Oh, but I am sorry to see you here," he whispered. "How has it happened?"

She was white and tired and frightened to the point of collapse and the anxiety of the day had scored deep lines in her face, but she was keyed up by the suspense and her eyes were as brave as ever.

"It has been perfectly frightful," she whispered back. "They took us prisoners when the herd ran over our camp. We were off to the side and they sent some men over there to keep the herd down the gully. They saw us and took us. We had no business here at all. It isn't my father's fault, Mr. Keene. Dr. Ives persuaded him and Mr. Bates to trail you to find out where those placer diggings are—the Blue Bucket, you know—it was wrong, of course, but I had to come when my father came. Oh, but I was glad to hear that Ives man say what he did to clear you. Now you can go back to Deadwood if you ever get clear of these awful beings. I just want you to understand, Mr. Keene, that it did not need a confession to make me know that you did not do it. I knew all along that whoever did it, it was not you. Now even Bates and my father must believe. Where will they take us?"

"Heaven only knows," groaned poor Ralph. "I only hope it is some place from which we can escape."

They rode for hours always straight to the north and not till dark was drawing down upon the barren ranges did they halt for the night. Finally in a timbered valley on the banks of a little stream they halted to water their horses. Blue Wolf reined in his pony and spoke a few words that sent a half-dozen young warriors scurrying in hot haste to the crest of the next ridge. Peter Boyce and Ralph watching them in the long twilight, for it was nine o'clock and still not dark, saw them come scurrying back faster than they had gone—one of them holding in his hand an object that at first neither of the Americans could identify. It was the shoulder blade of a long dead buffalo bull as white as marble, and he thrust it into Blue Wolf's hands with a guttural word of explanation.

A ring of warriors instantly formed, holding back from their chief till he should call on them for an expression of opinion. Glancing covertly over the shoulders of the ring of armed men, Peter Boyce and Ralph could see that the white, flat surface of the bone was covered with a hundred little marks in red and black over which Blue Wolf and two of the older warriors pored with interest.

After a word or two with his advisers Blue Wolf turned to the array of waiting warriors and spoke a few quick words.

That camp went crazy.

CHAPTER XV

"WHAT is it? What is the matter?" The excitement consequent on the reading of the message on that shoulder-bone loosened the tongues of even Ives and Preston, and they joined the rest of the Americans who had gathered around Peter Boyce.

"You understand their language, Boyce," said Preston. "Tell us what all this excitement means. Can you make out what it all is about?"

"M-hm," said Mr. Boyce dryly. "I sure can make it out. The mail man has just brung in a postal bone and they have found the message to be some important."

"A message? What kind of a message? What did it say?"

"I haven't had a right good look at it yet, but you can tell for yourselves by lookin' at the camp just about what the message said."

A glance at the Indians about them told clearly that the message that that bone brought was indeed important. Every man in camp was intent on furbishing up the articles of his personal equipment and there was scouring of rifles, coloring of lance-staves with paint, painting of faces and packing in general of the scanty belongings

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with which Indians on a hunting party burden themselves.

Every man was so intent on his own affairs that but little attention was paid to any of the prisoners. One or two warriors, in passing or repassing them, threw at them glances that were by no means reassuring; but they were not molested.

"If I was asked for an expert opinion about it I'd say that the value of our stock has sure gone down in the past hour," commented Mr. Boyce to Ralph. They were standing in a little group in the very center of the camp surrounded by the scurrying warriors. "There's that Blue Wolf now! I'm goin' to work over near him. I want to get another look at that bone letter if I can get close enough to it. I may be able to figure out some of what it says."

He sauntered over to the place where the chief stood and the next moment his wish was granted for Blue Wolf, piling lance and shield on top of his rifle and bow-case, set to work to rope a fresh pony on which he placed an elk-horn saddle that was the pride of his life. Mr. Boyce strolled toward him and took a good look at the bone—of contention.

"Don't touch it," he whispered fiercely to Bates, who had followed him and was about to pick it up. "Let it alone. I can read her as she lays. If they should find out that I can read it there might be trouble. Stand in front of me so they won't see me lookin' at it."

He stared and stared, his brows knit in speculation as he tried to read what was written on that piece of white bone, and, as his companions watched him, they saw his face darken.

"What is it, Pete?" whispered Ralph, when he could endure the suspense no longer.

"It's —— an' repeat," said Mr. Boyce, shortly. "That's what it is, if I read it clear. And I can make it out all right——"

"What does it say?" Ralph asked the question while others stood waiting with bated breath.

"A whole lot o' things. Now I may be wrong, but here's what I make of it. See those three lines drawn across each other with the wavy line risin' from 'em? That's meant for a fire. The seven lines under it just gives the number seven. That means that the Seven Council Fires are to gather. The Seven Council Fires is what the Sioux call themselves. It's a gatherin' of all the Sioux. The Arm with blood droppin' from it means the Cut-Arms; the Cheyennes, they're to come, too. The hand holdin' a nose means the Smellers; the Indians use that sign for the Arapahoes; they call 'em the Smellers. It's all clear so far. The Sioux, the Cheyennes an' the Arapahoes are to hold a big council. When?

"If it was two days from now they would have drawed a sun with one line under it. They haven't drawn anything, so I take it that the meetin' is right away. Where? See the figure of an elk there?— That's the Indian name for the river we white men call the Yellowstone. They call it the Elk River. Look at the straight line in front of the elk. That means 'Go straight down to the Elk River.' In plain English that reads, 'Go on down this valley to the Yellowstone River.' If you all ask me, I'd sure say that old Blue Wolf is excited because he has just got a message tellin' him that he must come as quick as he can with his band to join in a general council of the Sioux, Cheyennes and the Arapahoes that is bein' held now somewhere in this valley between here and the place where this river joins the Yellowstone."

A sudden flurry among the Indians brought them all at once "to horse" and in a few minutes the entire party was up and away galloping over grassy swales, turning down the valleys knee-deep in lush grasses and where the plants grew thigh deep, moving always at the long lope that is the natural gait of the Indian pony and that eats up the miles like a wolf's trot.

Darkness came and the stars bursting suddenly into brilliant points in the black velvet of the sky gave a clear light of their own. There was no moon, but just that impalpable half-light that always shows on the plains of the Great West in which men and horses bulk as big as elephants.

Time and again during that wild night's ride Ralph pressed his pony close to where Mary Preston rode, hoping to get a word with her, but only twice did the chance for even a whispered word come to them. Each time he started to speak some observant warrior pushed his pony up between them and speech was cut off and a guttural grunt told him that the interference was intentional. Walk and lope; walk and lope they moved steadily on through the long hours of that endless night. Guess they might and

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guess they did, where they were being taken, but there was no halt.

There was even no perceptible slackening of the gait, for the Indian pony was made of steel and whale bone and was tireless on the march, and the Plains Indian, while probably the most perfect horseman that the world has ever seen, was also beyond a doubt the most merciless to his beast. Yet he could coax more miles out of a tired pony than any white man who ever lived.

TIME and again they forded torrents that roared like thunder in the dark; the waters icy and foaming. Time and again, when they thought themselves about to halt, they found that they were only breathing their mounts for a faster gait over the next divide.

"That message must have been a darn sight more important than I thought it was," growled Peter Boyce in Ralph's ear as they thundered up a long slope. "We've already come nearly twenty-five miles, if I'm any judge of pace. I'd give a whole lot to know what the trouble is. I can't help thinkin' that we're in a darned bad mess of some kind."

"I've felt that way right along," Ralph heard himself saying. "But this party is only a hunting party, Pete."

"Aye. I've been assurin' myself of that fact for the last twenty miles. As I figure it out they have been out on a hunt and something has happened that has made it necessary to call a council of the full tribe. Heaven only knows what it can be. It must be something pretty bad to draw a successful hunting party off from the heels of a buffalo herd when they were just makin' their kill. That kill was to supply 'em with meat and hides for the comin' winter. I'd give a lot to know what the matter is."

A horse pushed up in the night on the other side of him and Peter Boyce found himself riding knee to knee with Ives. The old man eyed him scornfully in the starlit dusk, but said no word. Dawn was flushing redly over the mountains to the east and every object took on giant proportions in the false dawn. Ives presently broke the silence.

"Look here, Boyce, I've been wantin' to speak to you for some time—ever since last night, in fact. I'm—I'm—sorry for what took place back there in Deadwood—I am sorrier than I can say and——"

"You don't say?" rejoined Peter Boyce, energetically. "Why, man, you can't have nothin' to be sorry for. All that you did was to poison a man you called your best friend and then try to lay the blame on his nephew, because, if you could get him out of the way, you'd get what his uncle left—I ain't a whole lot particular about most things and I don't care a —— how Jerry Lane died, but I've got to draw the line somewhere and I choose to draw it at you, Ives."

Silence fell for a moment. The old man spoke again.

"Of course we both know why you were trailin' us. You were after Ralph——"

"No, no. We were only tracking you to find the location of the Blue Bucket diggin's——"

"So you say, but, Ives, it ain't reasonable, I tell you. One bullet placed in Ralph Keene's back at night, when I couldn't see who did it, would bring you in more ready cash than the Blue Bucket diggin's would bring you in in a year. You never trailed us across the hills and into the Indian country just to find out where some diggin's was in which there might or might not be gold——"

"Did you find them—?" Ives could not repress the feverish interest that spoke in every tone.

"If it will interest you even a little bit, I don't mind tellin' you that we did. We found the most likely placer diggin's since Sutter washed his first pan in California."

Even Ralph, riding on the far side of Peter Boyce, could see the start that Ives gave.

"You did? Where are they? What are they?"

"They were just exactly where an' what Mrs. Clarke said they would be. We hit the trail and went straight to the place where an ash tree and a cottonwood grows together—" Ralph grinned at this obvious lie—"and there we found it. It was gold clear up to the grass roots."

"It's curious that you didn't get any of it," commented Ives sarcastically.

"Who said we didn't? We panned out a whole lot of it and had it packed away in a couple of hide sacks when that infernal buffalo stampede came along and the pony carryin' the sack went down in front of the herd. That fool pony was trampled out o' sight——"

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"Can you get back there?" asked Ives with sudden interest.

"We can't get anywhere just now," remarked Mr. Boyce, grimly. "We'll be playin' in big luck if we save our hair this trip, Ives, and don't you forget it. Look at Blue Wolf! You can tell from the look on his face just how much he loves us. He shows his affection clean through his paint just like a girl."

Blue Wolf had pushed his pony up close to where Mr. Boyce and Ives rode and eyed them malevolently.

"Blue Wolf is glad that the White Men have strong medicine. They will need it," he said with biting emphasis. "It can kill a horse. Can it save a man or is it only good war medicine?"

"What does he say?" asked Ralph.

"I'll tell you, but for the Lord's sake take hold of yourself. Don't let him see that he's got us where the hair is short," muttered the old man. He translated what Blue Wolf had said and Ives flinched as though he had been struck. As Blue Wolf moved on to the head of the column, Ives turned to Ralph.

"Look here, Keene! I have said that I am sorry for what took place back in Deadwood. If we ever live to get back there I will take steps to correct all the harm that I have done you. If I had it to live over again I would do very differently— Hang it, man! You can't understand what it is to a man to be confronted with a sudden temptation— Well, I was, and—I fell. Keene, as God is my judge, man, the memory of that—accident—" even to himself Ives would not call it anything but an accident— "sticks by me. I tell you I have lived the thing through every night since then. It's driving me crazy—I think sometimes."

He broke off for a moment. He was trembling visibly.

"Look here, Keene! Do you know what they'll do to us?"

"THEY won't do anything to Miss Preston or to Peter Boyce or to me," said Ralph, briefly. "I ain't any fonder of contemplating death than any other man is, but they will never torture any of us. I have the means in my pocket to prevent that if I have to; and, if it is necessary, I will——"

"For the love of heaven, Keene, give me just three of those capsules," implored Ives. His voice was low and impressive and the sweat was standing on his forehead in great beads. The man was pitifully frightened and the special devil of fear leaves its marks. "How many of those capsules have you got, Keene?"

"I have three left," said Ralph slowly. "You can figure who will have to go without one."

"One will do for three men," said Ives hoarsely, "if it is used rightly. My —— Keene! You can't have seen Indian torture or you wouldn't say 'No.' I have seen it. They are keeping us for the meeting of the full tribe, Boyce says. Are you fool enough to think that any of us can escape? Why man! They will kill us and take Mary Preston there to a fate that is a thousand times worse than death."

Ralph gave a sudden start. He had not thought of that. He had only remembered that to Blue Wolf all six of them represented a hated and a feared race. Fool that he was, he had not thought of what Ives suggested till now. He remembered now that he had not yet given to her that tiny glass capsule that in dire emergency would save her from all danger and woe. No one must see him give it to her. The Indians as yet did not suspect the existence of such a thing. He would get it to her unnoticed. So working very carefully he managed to tear loose a strip of lining from his coat. When he had done this he worked the cork of the bottle loose in his pocket and managed to drop the pellets loose in the pocket. One of these he passed to Peter Boyce.

"Take good care of it, Pete. You know what it is. When the time comes either swallow it or smell it."

"Good," the old man promptly buried it in the recesses of a capacious pocket.

"I want to get this one into Miss Preston's hands unseen by the Indians."

"I'll have my pony stumble at the top of the next rise," volunteered Mr. Boyce. "When he does that, you ride up close and give it to her."

His horse promptly went down upon his knees on the top of the next ridge. A hearty curse from the rider brought the Indians up with threatening gestures. Ralph immediately drove his pony forward till he rode knee to knee with Mary.

"Take this," he whispered, thrusting the roll of cloth into her readily extended hand.

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"Put it where you can't lose it, for it is the last but one that I have."

Her look was a question.

"It is one of those poison capsules. They have taken our arms so that we can't follow the old frontier rule of keepin' the last shot for ourselves. Anyway, this is better than any shot. It is instantaneous and certain. This is our last shot—if we need it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Mary briefly; "I understand." She took the tiny roll and thrust it into the masses of her hair.

Again an observant warrior closed in on them in the growing light and Ralph dropped to the rear. They rode forward into the dawn.

The nature of the valley had changed. The long lines of the grass-covered bluffs closed in toward the creek bed and rose in tier above tier of green and yellow verdure from the bottom that was filled with cottonwood trees. That line of bluffs was cut in many places by steep-sided gorges running down into the stream bed and each gorge was filled with heavy brush and big trees. There were many pockets along those bluffs and in one of these they passed an Indian wickiup—a temporary shelter that was made simply by pulling together and tying the tops of low bushes and then spreading blankets or hides over them. Peter Boyce turned to a warrior riding next to him.

"What name do the Dakotas give this river?" he asked.

"The Greasy Grass——"

"By gosh! They have worked north with a vengeance. That's the Sioux for what we call the Little Big Horn. I'd like to know what's up."

"My ——, Pete! Look there—" Ralph's tone jarred upon him like a blow—Peter Boyce swung quickly in his saddle and saw his partner's finger pointing down stream—"All the Indians in the world have gathered here. Look, man!"

His finger pointed straight down the valley past a curve in the western bluffs where the flat land spreading away from a protecting hill-shoulder was literally covered with thousands of the lodges of the Indians.

"Great Heavens!" Peter Boyce's voice was high and piercing and his tone became querulous in his excitement. He had reason.

The camp lay to the west of the brawling river which here was about twenty yards wide with an average depth of perhaps three feet. The village extended to the north down the river as far as the eye could reach, filling every little pocket and gully. The lodges were arranged by tribes and by families and extended certainly for four miles. There were four rows of the great skin lodges that would shelter eight or ten people and in between the lodges stood many tiny wickiups that sheltered single warriors.

As Blue Wolf's band drew near the upper end of the village, a warrior who was sunning himself by the door of his lodge saw them and sprang to his feet giving a view halloo; a shrill yell that echoed and reechoed from hill to hill bringing men, women and children into the open from lodge and wickiup and from the crowded creek-bed where they were getting water. Instantly they surged about the returning band, eager, anxious, questioning.

Well as Peter Boyce understood the tongue of the Sioux, he had difficulty in following the quick-voiced talk. A sudden word from Blue Wolf made him turn in his saddle and look at him. The chief was gazing steadily off to the northwest where on the bare top of a high, rocky knoll a gaily painted lodge had been erected. At the open door of the lodge a powerful warrior sat. His body and face were completely swathed in a bright red blanket and a little fire burned before him. He was alone and he faced the bare line of the eastern hills on the bluffs across the creek. As they watched him they heard his voice rise in a droning monotone, then fall away into an undertone filled with weird cadences. The very sound was thrilling.

A MAN asked Blue Wolf a question. "A message came to us last sleep and we came back at once," said Blue Wolf shortly. "What is the need?"

"Word has come to us—" The warrior addressed drew himself up austerely—"Last night at sundown two of our young men who were on their way to the Agency (in Nebraska) found a box of the Long Knives' bread (soldiers' hard tack) over in the valley of the Powder River. They found the trail of the Long Knives. They are many. Long Yellow Hair leads them (Custer). They followed the trail that Yellow Hand and Tall Horse made four and ten sleeps ago coming here——"

"Huh! It is good. What then?" Blue

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Wolf's words were absolutely noncommittal. "Who is that who makes medicine on the hill-top?"

"The chief medicine-man of all the Dakotas," rejoined the other gravely. "There will be a battle and he makes medicine for us. It is Ta-tanka Iyotanka——"

Peter Boyce recognized the Indian name for Sitting Bull.

"My Lord," he gasped to Ralph. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes. But I do not understand what they say——"

"That man just told Blue Wolf that General Custer has come up the Rosebud with a force of soldiers and that two Indians found a box of hard bread on the trail and while picking it up saw the soldiers, and that man on the hill-top yonder is Ta-tanka Iyotanka, the chief medicine man—conjurer, you understand, and that he is making medicine for a big battle. Boy, we're in one —— of a fix——"

"For God's own sake give me that capsule," whispered Nathan Ives. He had heard every word that Peter Boyce had said and he realized all the probable consequences to them.

Ralph shook his head positively.

"There are not enough to give you one," he said curtly.

Ives dropped back and so did not hear Ralph's last words as he muttered more to himself than to Peter Boyce, "If you do get one it'll be the last thing in this world that I do give you. You'll get one when you least expect it. What now, Pete?"

For Blue Wolf had signaled to his men to close up and dismount.

CHAPTER XVI

IN A moment that little group of prisoners was the center of a crowd gone crazy. As warriors, the men held aloof, but the squaws and children surged around the party like waves around a rock, reviling, cursing, striking with clenched fists and such sticks as were close at hand, any of the prisoners whom they could reach.

Try as he did, Ralph could not entirely ward off the blows that were aimed at Mary Preston. She seemed the special target for the hatred of the women, particularly those who were young and who had any pretensions to being good-looking. Fortunately for her, she could not understand what they said and their fiendish outcries meant no more to her than the frenzied yelpings of a lot of dogs. It was a horrid pandemonium to her from which she shrank back terrified by the fierce-eyed old hags who openly gloated over her.

Blue Wolf let the uproar grow for some time. When it reached a point when it seemed that they could no longer be restrained, he raised his hand and forced his way between the women who were rapidly driving themselves frantic with their own cries, and drove them back. He had his own plans for the prisoners and he did not propose to have those plans spoiled by the work of any marplots.

"This is no time to play with the white men," he urged. "When the sun goes down and the medicine that Ta-tanka Iyotanka makes has made their hearts sick with fear, we will see them dance. This squaw—" he pointed to the shrinking Mary who had cowered back into the ring of Ralph's protecting arm which had found its way around her—"shall be the property of the man who shall win the loudest shriek from the tall warrior—" He indicated Ralph.

A yell of approval from the men followed his words. The women were not so loudly jubilant. There were many men in that camp who were expert in the devilish art of torture and who as openly coveted the pale beauty of the white girl, as there were hundreds of squaws who resented their preference.

"Take them to Blue Wolf's lodge," he called to a tall middle-aged warrior who in the full-feathered war bonnet of an Uncapapa Sioux was beginning the stately, rhythmical tread of the war dance. Others who were about to join him hesitated.

"Look! Tan-tanka Iyotanka has made his medicine. He returns to give it to us."

Blue Wolf had seized the critical moment to sway the feelings of the crowd. He pointed to the lone figure of Sitting Bull who in the full panoply of his calling was slowly striding down the hill. Now Ta-tanka Iyotanka, Sitting Bull, as the white men called him, was no warrior. He was a great medicine man of the tribes. Indeed he was the greatest medicine man who ever dominated the actions of the far-scattered lodges of the Sioux. He was the greatest prophet of his people. At this time he was in the very prime of life, about forty-five years of age, heavy set and well developed,

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standing about five feet eight inches in his beaded moccasins.

He had a great following, because, unlike other prophets, he had always made a practise of telling his people what they wanted to hear. Most of the Indians lived on the various Agencies where they drew a certain allowance of clothing and rations from a credulous Government, but Sitting Bull was known as an irreconcilable and it was to his lodge that the Agency Indians fled when they were absent from the Agencies on passes to hunt or to visit their own people who had not taken Government protection.

He was not an accredited war chief, but as the putative head of a band of warriors who gave him at least a pseudo allegiance, he had a following and this following was always increased by the results of his incantations. Did a hunting party make a big kill of buffalo? Sitting Bull gravely informed them that it was because of his medicine that unknown to them he had made. On this particular occasion he had been busy making war medicine for his tribe and as he came down from the hill to the flat land the old men and warriors crowded around him and for a moment silence fell. Presently he began to speak in a sing-song monotone, his voice rising and falling in rhythmic cadences. The words seemed to drive the crowd frantic.

Women and children screaming shrilly ran to and fro like rats in a granary. Men seized their rifles, bows and lances, brandishing them above their heads shrieking and yelling like fiends from the Pit. Several young men, messengers, ran quickly in different directions down the valley calling out news of some kind as they ran and that news seemed to drive the hearers frantic with excitement.

"What did he say?" demanded Preston who had pressed close to Peter Boyce.

The old man ceased from pulling his gray beard long enough to say:

"As well as I can make out, he told them that he had made medicine and that his medicine is good. He says his medicine has told him that the Long Knives—that means white soldiers—will attack the Sioux and that the white men will all be killed. Look at 'em will you?" He pointed down the valley. "What rot he's tellin' them. If the news that they have got is correct—if Custer is sure enough after this outfit—they'll get the surprize of their lives; but, my Lord, look! I hope for our own sakes that Custer has got a good-sized force with him. I can't believe what Blue Wolf was told——"

THE whole broad expanse of that long valley had sprung into sudden life at the word from the running messengers and quicker than ever the Scottish blades and targes had sprung from cover at the summons of Rhoderick Dhu, each lodge and wickiup gave up its quota of armed and painted warriors, yelling, screeching, wildly gesticulating with rifles, lances and bows swinging and glittering in the morning sunlight, feathered war-bonnet and painted shields, war-shirts and gaily bedizened medicine bags, stone ax and Henry rifles supplied by the kindly offices of one Department of a paternal Government to men who desired to fight members of another; that camp vomited forth three thousand warriors—nearer five thousand if it be considered that in an Indian fight every boy of fourteen who was big enough to hold a rifle over a rock was a putative warrior.

Uncapapa, Sans Arc, Minneconjou, Brules and Cheyennes all had their camps along that narrow valley that was nowhere more than a half-mile wide. The skin lodges followed every turn and twist of each little creek that emptied into the Greasy Grass as the Sioux called the Little Big Horn. Down they came, war chief and medicine man, sub-chief and wily scarred warriors who had fought in many a battle with the invading whites.

Men were there who had fought with Red Cloud's band; men who had followed the redoutable Black Kettle and Tall Bull, the most devilish of all the Indian partizans; men who had fought in the famous Wagon Box fight and in the Fetterman battle. Every Indian band that had won fame or notoriety, it depends on the angle from which their actions were viewed, were there, but chief among them, first-class leaders among all that gathering of Indians, certainly the greatest in point of numbers as the most dangerous in point of war-like efficiency ever seen together on the North American continent, were Black Moon, Crow King, and Gall, from the Uncapapa branch of the Dakotas; Crazy Horse, Big Road, and Low Dog, from the Ogalalas; Spotted Eagle, of the Sans Arc Sioux;

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Hump, of the Minneconjous; and Lame Deer, as well as Little Horse and the famous White Bull of the Cheyennes. Even among these, Crazy Horse, Gall, and Crow King stood out preeminently as acknowledged leaders. They had proved their skill in many a Border fight.

A sudden chorus of sharp yells far beyond the camp made Peter Boyce look quickly through the rising dust wreaths and the smoke that was blowing from a thousand fires. A great low-lying bank of red dust veiled the blue of the June sky and a far-off roar as of the sea upon a sandy beach came to him. Suddenly he knew what it meant. It was the noise of the trampling thousands of the herd of the war-ponies being herded into camp. Astounded, the white men watched them come in circling hundreds, checking, milling, halting to graze, but always coming.

"Father in Heaven!" groaned Peter Boyce. "Look at them! There are forty thousand ponies if there is one. Half the Sioux people are here today and all their wealth is in ponies. There will be trouble here— Big trouble too——"

Four warriors detached themselves from Blue Wolf's band and gathered about the prisoners. One of them seized Ives by the shoulder and grunted rather than spoke. The words were gibberish but the action was unmistakable.

"White men come with Little Bear. Not make talk. Come quick to lodge— over here—"

There was no help for it and they followed the men. Any place was preferable to standing in the middle of that howling group of yelling savages who were fast giving way to the blood lust. Already warriors were breaking away from the groups and were running to their lodges where they quickly painted their faces with the *sapa* the black paint that means only—War!

Peter Boyce and all his party knew very well that, Fortune failing them that day, they were doomed, and even Peter Boyce usually optimistic though he was, was apparently overcome as they were roughly shoved into the open door of an empty lodge at which one of the Indians promptly seated himself with a cocked Henry rifle lying across his naked knees ready for immediate action.

"Mebbe so white man try run, Little Bear shoot um."

They said not a word but sat miserably on the piles of half-cured skins that littered the interior whose smell was like that of an amateur taxidermist's shop.

"My ——" Till now Iron-hook Bates had not spoken for many hours, and his very tone carried a conviction and weight that would have been denied a more garrullous man. "There can be only one end to all this! They talked of war with our people. What is it? What do they mean? There was no war when we left. What soldiers are following them?"

"They said 'Long Yellow Hair,' and that is Custer's name," grunted Peter Boyce.

"Aye. I heard that. It's impossible. Custer hasn't been in this country since 'Seventy-three when he fought the Sioux on the Yellowstone River. I tell you they must be wrong. They've got the wrong news——"

By his lights Bates was right. None of those white men could have known of the fateful happenings of the past month while they were practically outcasts in the hills—happenings that were to culminate in red tragedy on that fateful twenty-fifth of June in the year of Grace 1876!

IT HAD been the seventeenth of May when Ralph and Peter Boyce had left Deadwood so hurriedly. Two days later the others had followed them. Yet on that very seventeenth of May General Terry had left Fort Abraham Lincoln in Dakota to fight the Indians where he should meet them. The plan of action was simple and well devised. Terry with the Seventh cavalry under Custer and some infantry was to move from the east; Gibbon with the Seventh infantry and a battalion of the Second cavalry was to move from the west while Crook was to close in from the south moving through a country that was almost literally a *terra incognita*. There were no reliable maps and there were no white guides to be depended upon.

Terry's column hampered from the first in its movements by the necessity of taking along fifteen hundred wagons moved slowly. Its day's march was regulated by the supply of water, wood and grass obtainable on the route, for no fuel or forage could be carried. Yet on the ninth of May it was at the Little Missouri River and on the eighth of June Terry and Gibbons met where the Powder River runs into the Yellowstone. No Indian

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sign had been seen by either column. They were therefore certain that the Indians lay south of the Yellowstone river and to the west of the Powder.

They could not go east of the Big Horn river because that stream was in freshet and impassable. It was very certain therefore that the Indians that they sought, lay somewhere in the region bounded on the north by the Yellowstone river, on the east by the Powder and on the west by the Big Horn and on the south by the Big Horn mountains. It was a big district to search and once the game was afoot the hunt would be a dangerous one, for neither column was large enough by itself to handle the enemy. An additional reason why the foe could not have fled to the west of the Big Horn river, lay in the fact that the Crows lived there and they were in perpetual feud with the Sioux.

On June tenth Major Reno scouting up the Powder river with six troops of the Seventh cavalry, struck the trail of a large body of Indians. The tracks were about three weeks old and showed that a large party had moved westward. He returned with the news and on June twenty-first a conference was held on board the supply steamer *Far West* that had accompanied Terry's column in its march up the Missouri river. Terry, Gibbons and Custer met on that steamer and the position of the Indians was pricked off as accurately as might be on a map that was none too accurate. That position was settled as being somewhere in the valley of the Little Big Horn.

Their number could be only vaguely surmised, but the force was known to be large. For that reason the orders that were given required a carefully considered concentration before the final blow when the Indians should be found. The column under Gibbons was to move slowly up the valley of the Big Horn arriving not later than the twenty-sixth of June; while Custer with his famous regiment, the Seventh cavalry, marching up the Rosebud river was to proceed twenty miles beyond the place where Reno had found the trail that led westward. From that point he was to proceed slowly into the valley of the Little Big Horn feeling well to his left to find the Indians. Above all things he was to be careful to arrive in the valley of the Little Big Horn not earlier than the twenty-sixth of June, the same day on which Terry was to arrive there from the north.

He was also to keep in touch with Terry by means of scouts that were given him for that purpose. The result was to be a final attack in force by the concentrated columns that was to send the Indians scurrying in hot haste to their Agencies where they could be rounded up and guarded ensuring to the white man the undisputed possession of the Indians' broad domain.

What happened was red tragedy!

CUSTER moving rapidly with his well-known speed made a forced march, picked up the trail that Reno had reported and, flushed with success and with the prospect of immediate action, followed the trail instead of going up the valley of the Rosebud the twenty miles that had been contemplated he should go, so that on the night of the twenty-fourth of June he was on the ground where it was intended he should not arrive until the morning of the twenty-sixth, thirty-six hours before Gibbons could by any possibility be expected to be in place at the junction of the Little Big Horn and the Yellowstone rivers.

His little column, the gallant Seventh cavalry alone, broke camp about eleven o'clock on the night of the twenty-fourth of June for the last march that was to bring them perhaps success, certainly undying glory. During that painful night march a box of hard bread slipped from one of the pack mules and some men were sent back for it. When they reached the place they found some hostile Indians trying to open the box. The Indians promptly left and ran away across the hills to the west. At once it was realized that the presence of the column would become known. There was only one thing now possible—a quick advance upon the Indians to strike them before they could utilize the news that the scouts would bring them. Followed an immediate advance into the Valley of the Little Big Horn —The Valley of the Shadow of Death.

A little before noon on the fatal twenty-fifth of June the force passed the last ridge that separated the valley of the Rosebud from that of the Little Big Horn. Custer with five companies, C, E, F, I, and L was on the right, Reno with three troops, A, G, and M, marched a few hundred yards to his left; still farther to Reno's left was the veteran

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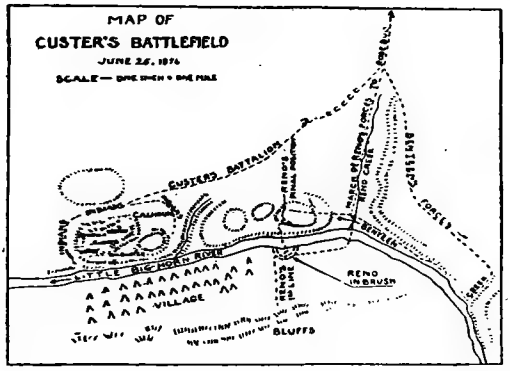

Benteen with D, H, and K while MacDougal with troop B was in charge of the pack-train with the cargoes of precious ammunition that was in reserve.

Five miles from the river Reno got his final orders; to move forward into the valley of the river; to locate the village and to charge whatever he should find; that he would be supported by Custer. Benteen was to cross the river and turn to his right sweeping up the western bank of the river, thus taking the village on the western side. Custer was to support Reno. It was the old-time form of attack on an Indian village—to drive the warriors from the lodges where the supplies were kept which would then be burned while the troops held back the warriors. By this means the whole force of the Indians would be stampeded and success would be certain.

Reno moved down the slopes into the creek-bed. On the far side of the stream, a half mile above the village but between the village and the point where Reno entered the water, Sitting Bull, who that day had a stroke of genius, had placed some sixty empty lodges that the Sioux called "Death Lodges." They were used as a decoy for Reno. Coming down the eastern slope of the creek he saw those empty lodges and believing they were the whole village he sent word back to Custer that the village was in front of him. Custer directed him to charge it. Then when his battle-line swung out into the flat Reno must have seen the whole valley filled with the skin lodges of the Sioux.

His right flank rested on the Little Big Horn; his left was held by a part of the Arickaree scouts, a broken reed indeed to trust when their opponents were the Sioux.

Instantly —— broke loose in that Valley of the Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII

THE mad thunder of the pony herd galloping in set every drop of blood dancing in the veins of all who heard it. The yells and war cries of the painted warriors, the staccato shrieks of the women and the children, the frenzied throbbing of the war drums from the medicine lodges, the dust and noise and savage uproar drew Peter Boyce to the door of the lodge. The cocked rifle of the guard dropped significantly till the muzzle came in line with his stomach sent him promptly back with a stifled oath. He drew back to the rear of the lodge where he took his stand facing the door so that he could look out of it as it faced to the southeast.

For ten minutes he stood gazing out into the sunlight. Later he realized that that was the longest ten minutes that he had ever lived. The very air was tense with the feeling that something was about to happen What was that? Something moved among the low brush that covered the western flank of the line of the bluffs across the creek to the southwest, a half mile away.

A half mile in that altitude is no bar to clear vision and Peter Boyce almost jumped clear in the air as he saw a long, thin dark column debouch from the bushes and disappear in the scrub along the creek bed. That column came on and on. He could not as yet see just what it meant but he was certain that it held a dread significance for the Indian village. On and still on it came, an occasional twinkle of light glancing from some exposed bit of metal that flashed in the sunlight. Then it swung around and faced the camp. It was Reno forming his battle line.

Peter Boyce shook like a man with an ague. This was life-saving news— There were soldiers indeed but—good God! Could this be the entire force with which the attack was to be made on the biggest Indian village in North America? He called to Ralph and his voice sounded in his own ears to be almost a squeak so thin and high was it with the excitement of the moment.

"Look, son! Climb up here an' look! By —— they're our own men! They're formin' to rush the lodges the way they always used to do— Listen, will you——"

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A shot rang out, sharp, sudden, stabbing the silence. Then the fight in the narrow valley opened with a furious fervor.

As yet no Indians had seen Custer moving north behind the covering line of hills to the east of the creek. Benteen had so far moved undisturbed. The Indians assumed that the foe in sight, Reno with his three companies, was the only foe and they massed to attack him.

Now Reno had gone down into that valley presumably with his mind made up that he was to charge the village. Those were his orders and he undoubtedly believed that the village was one of perhaps the sixty lodges that he had seen, that might number two hundred warriors. When he saw before him line after line of two thousand lodges his heart failed him.

Those lodges stretched for four miles along the stream and he could not see the end of the village. Charge? Why it was out of the question! Custer was to support him but Custer was not in sight. He was far off to the right with a river and a line of hills between them and he himself was left with three companies to face the entire Sioux people in arms.

"Prepare to dismount to fight on foot."

The prisoners could not hear the order, but it was given. In frenzied haste but ordered movements those gallant troopers dismounted; the horse-holders took the now restive horses to the rear and the perilously thin skirmish line stretched across the valley from bluff to bluff.

"They'll be with us in a minute," whispered the excited Mr. Boyce. "Look out for trouble when they hit the camp. The guard there at the lodge door will probably shoot at us if he sees an attempt bein' made to rescue us. If you get a chance, drop a blanket over his head—My Lord, Ralph—Look there!"

Well might he say it!

Two poor devils in that line of Reno's, their horses unmanageable from fright and the firing had broken from the line and were plunging at break-neck speed toward the hostile lines. Plunging, wrestling, fighting their maddened horses at every leap, well knowing the fate that would be theirs if they should fall into Indian hands, the riders struggled wildly to regain control of their mounts but those crazy horses were long past any efforts that their riders could put forth.

Down they came, over logs and rocks and stunted bushes, leaping everything in their wild rush for freedom. Bullets from friendly carbines and from hostile rifles whipped around them as they plunged down the valley and at last through the Indian lines. As they passed between the groups of fighting warriors each man seemed to turn and devote his fire upon those two lost Americans. They had no earthly chance of escape and they knew it. They never had a chance even to attempt to escape. Warrior after warrior sprang to his feet and sent his vengeful shots at the two men.

One of the soldiers reeled in his saddle struck by a dozen kindly bullets and plunged sideways to a merciful death as his horse also struck by a bullet, at last crashed to earth. The other, bucking madly even in mid-air threw himself head over heels over a great log, blundered to his feet and finally pitched headlong into a deep hole from which there was no escape. His rider lay very white and still where he lay, a scant hundred yards from the lodge where the six prisoners ground their teeth in impotent rage as they saw a party, not of warriors but of squaws, dash forward at the body.

There was a sudden scream then a succession of high, shrill yells as a stone-headed ax rose and fell again and again and a dozen women fought and tore for that most prized of all possessions—the reeking scalp.

OBLIVIOUS to the excited comments of her friends, Mary Preston sat upon a pile of skins in the lodge with her face buried in her hands. She did not want to look. It was bad enough to hear those fiendish shrieks that told as clearly as any words could have told exactly what had happened. She knew that some one had died and died in horrible agony. And she did not want to look.

She had long ago given up all hope of rescue for she felt very certain that their captors would kill them all rather than allow them to fall into the hands of their friends and she felt sure that it was just a question of time till she would be called upon to make use of that God-derived capsule that Ralph had given her. She guarded it very carefully for to her there was no question but that she would have to use it. Any other possibility never occurred to her.

Even the occasional hoarse words in which Mr. Boyce voiced his profanity did

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not awaken her yet she was perfectly conscious. She knew all that was taking place about her but she felt as though limbs and eyes and ears and brain were under a great weight which she could never shake off. She seemed to be standing far off, outside of herself looking impersonally upon what was happening.

And something else had happened! On Reno's left were grouped his Arickaree scouts and on these scouts fell the brunt of the Sioux fire from that side. Now the Arickaree never lived who could face the Sioux in battle and that party of Arickarees knew it well. They flinched from that blistering fire as children flinch from a hot blast and in another moment the Sioux warriors from the right of the Indian line had completely enveloped Reno's left flank.

With his left composed of those Arickarees there could be but one result. They broke and ran, some of them never stopping till they had run over a hundred and fifty miles from the scene of that bloody fight. Peter Boyce saw it all.

"By ——! Look Ralph—They're goin' back I say—Look at their left——"

Even Peter Boyce cowered away from the blaze of indignation in Ralph's tones as he cursed those paper-backed Arickaree scouts who had failed to hold on the left of Reno's line.

Back, back, back they went till they were enveloped entirely by that vicious fire from the rifles of the Sioux. That fire was not so deadly in its accuracy as by its withering intensity. With a final rush that party of scouts took refuge in flight that started when they reached their ponies and that stopped when they found shelter behind Powder River nearly two hundred miles away.

His left flank stripped, his front pierced, his horses becoming every moment more unmanageable his right threatened, Reno moved. He intended to fall back to the line of the trees. He was slammed back suddenly as one would slam a door and for a little space all order and cohesion was lost. Bloody Knife went down there fighting bravely by Reno's side and several white soldiers were killed. Instantly the command came:

"Mount and get to the bluffs."

Now those bluffs lay on the far side of the river and to get to them the creek must be crossed under fire. There were two ways to do it; the way it should have been done and —the way Reno did it. One troop heard the order to mount and move to the bluffs. The men mounted and the troop was ready to move when the order was changed. Again the men took their places in the line and again the order was given to move to the bluffs. Again no one but the troopers closest to Reno heard the order. Some moved and some did not.

The order had been changed twice already. Why not again? It was as the French say "An order and a change of order and—disorder." Those who heard the order obeyed it. Those who did not hear it, after some delay conformed to the movements of those who did, and, all cohesion lost, their officers in many instances separated from the men, the little force, no better than a mob now, broke for the friendly shelter of the bluffs.

There is no need to write the piteous details of what happened. How McIntosh was shot in the brush; how De Wolf, the imperturbable doctor, went down after killing a score of Indians with his long-ranged rifle; how Bennie Hodgson, the pet of the regiment, went down with a broken leg; how he was pulled out by a gallant comrade who refused to ride on without him and how finally he was killed. All these things are written in the red records of the Seventh cavalry.

UP THESE bluffs they went, pursuers and pursued. Providentially Benteen far to the southward had heard the firing and swept back down the valley intent on joining Reno or on taking part in the battle that had already joined. Scrambling up the bluffs with scores of blood-mad foes hanging on their flanks and rear Reno's men had scant time to scrape some shallow rifle-pits from which to start their fight for life.

Scattered rifle-fire from the lip of the bluffs held the crazy Indians back till the line was got into some semblance of order till finally a Crow scout seeing Benteen sweeping down the valley, rode to him and told him that the main fight was taking place right on the bluffs where the Sioux already had Reno beleaguered. There was only one thing for Benteen to do and he did it. He swept down upon Reno and joined forces with him and there on the very crest of the bluffs, out of sight of Custer, but in

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full view of all that four-mile-long village, surrounded on all sides by yelling, frenzied savages who knew but one end to a fight, without a drop of that cold, clear water that swept gurgling past the base of their refuge, they settled down in their rifle-pits to battle for their lives.

Ralph Keene and Peter Boyce watched every phase of that timid advance. They saw the sudden onslaught of the Indians on Reno's left flank; they saw the line rolled up and slammed back, first into the timber and later up the slope of the bluffs; they heard the firing break out anew, and, heart-sick with dread foreboding, not for themselves alone, they sat sullenly down on the pile of skins. Renewed firing brought them again to their feet and to the open door of the lodge.

Lines of Indians, quick-circling on their fleet war-ponies, men who had been sent scurrying to the lodges for more cartridges, the quick rush of a large body of mounted warriors under Chief Gall circling to the south to enclose that battling group upon the bluffs, gave them a new touch of excitement. Something else was afoot. Their friends were still fighting there on the bare hills across the creek; but this time in a strong position. There was hope of rescue yet; a very faint hope, it is true, but still it was there.

They could not know that what they had seen was but the prelude to the real tragedy that even then was not yet enacted. The stage was being rapidly set for it on those bare hill-tops two short miles away to the northeast, but the actual happening was screened from their eyes and they could not know how Custer, sweeping north under cover of that line of bare hills, had been seen by Gall nor how that wily chief, having felt Reno's pulse and found it weak, left a few warriors in position to hold him in check in case he should endeavor to leave his rifle-pits to help Custer, and then sent a courier to Crazy Horse who was pushing home the attack on Reno and bade him join him with all his men for the main attack on Custer.

Besides these reinforcements there were hundreds of warriors in the camp who had not yet taken part in the battle and who on their fleet war-ponies awaited eagerly a chance to prove their bravery and dash. Now they also joined Crazy Horse and Gall.

There were deep gullies in the line of the bluffs that gave access to the crest so that trails were found under cover all the way that led to the flanks and rear of the devoted little force of Custer and his five pet companies. In the twinkling of an eye those troops found themselves facing the tremendous line of the Indian villages. The Indians say that at the same moment their own forces appeared on Custer's rear and flank and that the troopers found themselves facing untold thousands of their active foemen with large numbers also in rear and on both flanks. To retreat was hopeless, to advance impossible.

The line of dismounted skirmishers was quickly formed and the horses in column of fours were sent to the rear under the charge of the horse-holders (every fourth man was a horse-holder) and those five companies, Tom Custer on the right, Yates, Smith, Keogh and Calhoun, prepared to fight what they must have known instinctively would be their last battle.

No man knows exactly what took place on those hill-tops. No man can read the secret of those forbidding ridges. It is known that in 1876 a cavalryman carried twenty rifle cartridges in a leather box on his belt with a few pistol cartridges and it was customary on campaign to carry a few more cartridges in the pockets. Spare ammunition was also carried in the saddle-bags.

During the initial stages of the fight this would naturally be with the led horses. The gray horses—Calhoun's troop—were stampeded early in the action and later Keogh's horses went, followed by the others and along with them went the spare ammunition in the saddle-bags. When that ammunition went, there went too with them the last faint hope of the doomed men that they might stave off defeat until relief should come.

The firing of that doomed band was slow and desultory for they had to husband that precious ammunition supply and yard by yard the men closed in toward the center, shortening their line and closing up those ghastly intervals through which determined foemen could have charged at any time. It is known that in spite of urgent orders to the gallant Benteen to bring up the pack mules, it could not be done. The last positive news from Custer was probably contained in the firing of two heavy volleys that Reno heard in the afternoon when the fight had been raging for some time. It was a last appeal for aid that could not be given.

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The fight had dragged on longer than Gall and Crazy Horse desired and they decided to end the carnage with one fierce onslaught so, massing thousands of warriors in the ravines on both flanks, with Crow King and Rain-in-the-Face leading a frontal attack, the myraid of foes in the full flush of bloody victory fell upon that thinned and weakened line. There was a fierce hand-to-hand fight with clubbed rifles and pistols against lances, Henry rifles, tomahawks and war-clubs helped out with war-bows and knives, and in fifteen minutes all was over.

Some, horse-holders it may be, were killed in a vain effort to escape, but when that crazy tide of plumed and feathered warriors aglow with all the panoply of savage warfare swept up and down that fatal ridge and then gave back, breathless and triumphant, to see what it had done there was disclosed the bulk of the fighting men of the Long Knives lying where they had fought; their officers in position! Their troopers in line!

Then the squaws took up their work!

THE shouting, the firing, the long shrill scalp hallos that rose in wave on wave of horrid sound told even to the prisoners that some grim tragedy more terrible by far than even that which they had witnessed, had been enacted. Even their guard till now passive and self contained, inscrutable, was visibly affected. Men, urging their war-ponies to a maddened run, yelling at the top of their voices, passed and re-passed the lodge all intent on but one thing; to loot the poor dead or to count coup on at least one of those defenceless bodies on the hill.

With no real hope of getting a reply, Peter Boyce shot a despairing question to the guard.

"Does Little Bear know what the distant shouting means?"

To his surprize he got an answer, and when it came it nearly floored him.

"Tatanka Iyotanka made strong medicine. His medicine told him that the Dakotas would ride over (*i.e.* kill) the Long Knives. It is done. The Long Knives are wiped out. The squaws go out to count the scalps."

Little Bear pointed over his shoulder and made no objection when the prisoners gathered at the door of the lodge staring eagerly toward the northeast.

They could not see much; the lodge door was too narrow; just the narrow valley filled with hurrying groups of women and children intent on their ghastly work while through those groups, yelling, firing their rifles indiscriminately, rode parties of painted warriors driven crazy by their unexpected success in the terrible catastrophe.

"The Sioux have wiped out all the Long Knives except those——" Little Bear pointed to the ring of Reno's men still fighting on the bluffs where mounted Indians still circled their position. "To-night there will be a scalp dance and my white brothers will be there. It will be then known who will own the squaw," Little Bear added grimly.

Even Peter Boyce shrank back for the moment appalled at the wave of ferocity that swept over the painted face streaked and spotted with the deadly *sapa*—the war black.

Suddenly, born of the desperate plight that they were in, a still more desperate plan suggested itself. If it failed they would but be killed. If they remained here it would be death by torture—certain death. Safety lay in that ring of rifles on the bluffs where the battling soldiers lay. Of course it was likely eventually that they too would be overcome.

The odds were all against them but there was at least a chance and he knew that there was no other chance. He motioned to Ralph to come to the back of the lodge where Ives sat on a pile of baled skins his head in his hands. Squatting behind the skins Peter Boyce whispered feverishly to his partner.

"It's all over but the shoutin', son, and they're doin' that now. We've got one chance out of a million——"

"I don't see it," said Ralph despairingly.

"Give me those two pellets of yours——"

Ralph took out the two capsules and handed them to him automatically. Boyce took them and turned to Ives. He spoke curtly.

"Now, Ives, listen good. Our lives depend on this bein' done and bein' done right. We have got to get clear and get over to those bluffs beyond the creek. The soldiers are still there and they seem to be holdin' their own. If we can kill the sentry at the door we can grab some of the loose ponies that are just outside the lodge and make a run for it. The whole tribe is over on the hills to the northeast. On the bluffs

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beyond the river scalpin' the dead over there and gatherin' in the loot. You take these capsules, doc—you know how to handle the poison better than we do. I'll give you a good chance to use it on him. The only thing is that you must not fail—How shall we do it?"

Ives seized the capsules with feverish eagerness. Here was the chance that he had sought in his hands at last. With one of these precious capsules in his hands he did not fear the torture of the Indians. He was guaranteed at least a quick and painless death. He would try one of them on the sentry but he would keep the other for himself. It made no difference to him that Ralph and Peter Boyce were now without any means of self protection.

"If I can get close to him," he said quickly, "I'll cram it in his mouth. If I can't do that I'll hold it in my hand and break it so that he will get the full strength of the fumes of it. One inhalation of it and he will be as dead as Julius Caesar."

"Like Jeremiah Lane," commented Ralph *sotto voce.*

"It won't do to bungle it," said Peter Boyce sternly. "I can give you but one chance." His eyes had narrowed to pinpoints in the intensity of his gaze.

"I will need but one——"

"Good. You Ralph stay with Miss Mary here. Bates, you and Preston wait for a word from me. Come on, doc. I'll engage his attention and then you do your work."

"He's used to it," whispered Ralph in Mary Preston's ear. "Wait now and watch. We're set on a hair-trigger now."

Peter Boyce, followed by Nathan Ives, clambered slowly over the piles of skins and moved toward the door of the lodge where Little Bear sat eyeing them stolidly.

CHAPTER XVIII

PETER BOYCE had gambled at every known game from the line of the Gadsden Purchase to the Canadian frontier during some sixty odd years of a sinful if varied life. Cards, dice, roulette on crooked tables and the stick game of the Indians all were known to him, and out of all his varied experience but two bits of knowledge remained to him that were to stand him in good stead this day.

One was that all men have quite as much curiosity about things with which they are unfamiliar as an antelope has; the other was that it is almost a physical impossibility for any man to refuse to take anything in his hand that is offered to him. His plan was based on these facts.

Once across the pile of heaped hides, he squatted unconcernedly on the floor by the door of the lodge immediately opposite the stolid figure of Little Bear. Now Little Bear was surly and angry because he had been kept out of the fight and had been made to keep watch over these prisoners and he made no effort to conceal his resentment.

"Tatanka Iyotanka made strong medicine," said Peter Boyce. "He is a great medicine man——"

"Huh——"

"Yep, you're sure right in that. But even Tatanka Iyotanka does not know all. He is but a young man in the business of making medicine. Does Little Bear remember when the earth trembled like a boy with the Spring ague?"

"Little Bear has seen it. It was twenty moons ago." He meant the great earthquake of 1874.

"Then Little Bear knows that I do not speak with a forked tongue. The medicine of the white man is stronger than the medicine of Tatanka Iyotanka."

Mr. Boyce subsided as though there were no more to be said on that subject. Little Bear took the bait promptly.

"The medicine of the white man did not save the soldiers on the hill yonder. Tatanka Iyotanka is the chief medicine man of all the Dakotas. He has been making medicine all day to help his people."

"Have the soldiers on the bluffs been over-ridden?" demanded Peter Boyce. "When the Dakotas fight twenty to one against the white man the medicine that Tatanka Iyotanka makes is strong. When one Sioux meets one white man the medicine of the Sioux is weak. Tatanka Iyotanka strikes harder with his tongue and lighter with his war-club than any warrior in the house of the Seven Council Fires."

This was so far true that Little Bear could not deny it. Big medicine man though he was, Sitting Bull was also known as the most monumental liar in all the tribes. Mr. Boyce went on:

"Can he tell you that there will be another

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trembling of the earth when the sun goes down?" he asked casually.

"No. And Little Bear does not believe it. He does not believe in the medicine of the white man."

"Good. It is well to be afraid to believe in what may hurt you. Did the warriors tell how my young man—" he pointed to Ralph—"killed a pony with a word?"

"They told, but Little Bear is a man and believes only what he can see and touch."

"Good," said Peter Boyce again. "Look at this——"

He detached a small brass compass from a cord about his neck and handed it to the surprized Little Bear. He took the compass in his left hand and gazed in a puzzled way at the vibrating needle.

"There is a devil that lives in it," quoth Peter Boyce sternly. "That evil spirit strives to get out of the glass case. It is his striving to get loose that makes the needle move. The evil spirit is an earth spirit and fears the trembling of the earth. He strives to get loose when he knows that there will be a trembling of the earth. See! He knows it now——"

"Huh!" Little Bear had never seen a compass and his astonishment was genuine. His eyes fairly bulged over the vagaries of that compass needle. It was close to the rifle barrel and the mass of metal had set the needle to swinging like a cat chasing its own tail.

"I speak with a straight tongue," said Mr. Boyce lying glibly. "Would Little Bear see the evil spirit that lives in the case? Would he see him made so sick that he will come out of the case? It is not easy to make him come forth for he is a strong spirit, but my young man can do it. The spirit is bad and very strong. He will take the form of a thick and black smoke with a face of fire on top of it. Only strong men can look at him. Would Little Bear see him?"

"Huh! Little Bear has camped on the head-waters of the Stinking Water and has slept in the house of the Thunder Bird—The Lightning—and never trembled. Let him see this earth spirit."

"My young man shall show him. He has a little ball of medicine that he will give that will make the evil spirit sicker than a warrior in the sweating lodge or than a drink of the Stinking Water."

He nodded gravely to Ives.

IVES came forward slowly. He carried that tiny straw-colored capsule very delicately as he advanced to the side of the wondering guard.

"See now—" Peter Boyce leaned forward confidently, every line of his figure tense with suspense. From behind the pile of evil-smelling skins in the rear of the lodge Bates and Tom Preston, Ralph and Mary watched them eagerly.

It is not often given to people to be placed in a position where they can feel that they are justified in praying that an attempt at murder will be successful, but they did that day. If their attempt failed to kill Little Bear every one of them would suffer.

"See now—" Ives changed the capsule from left to right hand and came forward to the side of the curious warrior. "My young man will place the medicine close to the end of the iron. Little Bear should hold the case close to his eyes. At first the evil spirit will be very small."

Little Bear lifted the compass toward his face and in that instant Ives passed his left arm about the neck of the doomed man and held him as in a vise while with the right hand he pressed the prussic acid capsule to the painted lips and—broke it.

Quick as Ives had been, the Indian had been quicker to read meditated assault. There may have been some intangible warning in the very tenseness of both white men that told him of some danger. The moment that Ives' left arm went up to pass about his neck Little Bear seized him with both arms in a grip of iron about the neck and pulled him down over him as he rolled over and over in an attempt to free himself. Together they touched the ground. When Little Bear's face was not three inches from that of Nathan Ives—the capsule broke.

There was a sudden flurry from the pair. Almost instantly Little Bear's feet stretched out with a spasmodic kick. Then they extended stiffly, his eyes blinked once and then shut like a trap.

"An' that's all right," said Peter Boyce grimly. "It worked fine, doc. You're sure a dandy little poisoner when it comes to callin' cases. You can let the evil spirit get up now, doc."

There was no answer. The old man stepped forward and tried to pull Ives free from the encircling grip of the Indian's arms but they were locked about his neck

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in the fixed embrace of death. For just a second even Peter Boyce shrank back appaled at the look in the eyes of Nathan Ives.

"Come here, Ralph," he finally managed to croak. He crooked a finger at the astonished Ralph, who pushed Mary Preston back upon the pile of skins and sprang to aid his partner.

"What is it?" he asked quickly as he leaped over a barrier of blankets and camp kettles topped by a sheaf of lance-staves.

"That—that—darned evil spirit—" For the life of him Peter Boyce could not help grinning—"done a good job, boy. It got 'em both. Look, will you——"

They looked and Ralph saw on the faces of both men the same look of fixed intensity that he had seen before on the face of his uncle Jerry Lane. The dead men seemed to be asking some unseen power what the purpose was in thus playing a joke on perfectly innocent people. There was surprize in that look, and terror, and the whole seemed inextricably mixed with an unholy mirth that lay behind it. The recollection of his own words came back to Ralph Keene with the force of a prophecy; the words that he had spoken to Nathan Ives that very morning when he had begged and implored him for one of those capsules and he had told him—

"You will get one when you least expect it."

"What now?" he asked looking to the old frontiersman for guidance.

"What now? Everybody up! Quick, man! Take his gun. You're quicker with a gun than I am. Take the gun and don't make any mistake. Shoot the first man who tries to stop us. There's so much shootin' goin' on that one more shot won't be noticed. Now, Miss Mary—you pull that blanket over your body and face so you can't be recognized—wait till I daub some o' that paint on you. It ain't the kind you're used to but it'll do— So."

While he talked, he worked, daubing a generous amount of white and red paint over the face of the shrinking girl——

"Now all of you hide behind the edge of the lodge door while I catch up some of those loose ponies."

There was no dearth of ponies. Hundreds were running loose about the valley with their lariats dragging as they ran in and out between the lodges, whinnying and fighting. Entirely unnoticed by any one, for the attention of the camp was centered on that awful scene on the hill-tops two miles away to the northeast and on the line of bluffs where Reno's men still battled for their lives in their shallow rifle-pits, Peter Boyce walked apparently unconcerned, for haste would have betrayed him, to a bunch of war ponies standing quietly under a great cottonwood tree. Each had a lariat fastened to the lower jaw; none had saddles. Picking the first five that he could reach he led them back to the door of the lodge.

"NOW—" he fairly thrust Mary Preston on the back of the nearest pony. "You fellows take what you can get to fight with and we'll be off. You take the lead, Ralph! You've got the rifle. Shoot the first man who crosses our trail close enough to hit without missin'. Bates, you take that stone-headed ax! You, Preston, grab that lance. Now we're fixed! Remember now! Pull your blankets close about your faces and don't answer if any one speaks to you. Leave that to me!

"There's no need for hurry till we get close to the line of Indians on the hill. They're so busy keepin' the soldiers in the rifle-pits that they'll have their backs turned to us till we get close to 'em. After that it will be a short race and—we've got to win—considerin' what them Indians'll do to us if they catch us, you might say it's a stake race—all ready? Then—let's go——"

They should have attracted attention, but they did not. Down they went riding carefully and as quickly as they dared. They won their way across a full half-mile of open valley without attracting any attention. Behind them and to their left thousands of squaws mingled with children and warriors were milling about in a bloody maelstrom gathering the loot of battle from that awful field. To their front all was clear as far as the creek bed. Beyond that narrow stream would lie the test.

"That Indian swallowed everything, didn't he?" said Ralph jubilantly as they rode along.

"He sure did," said Mr. Boyce briefly. "He swallered everything—every derned thing includin' my brass compass. At least I couldn't find it. Well, maybe it'll be of some use to them where they're at.

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They're both headed for the same place—the place of the said Evil Spirit, I reckon. If they don't make that Evil Spirit sick like I said, I miss my guess. Here we are at the foot of the hill! Over the creek and up the hill, boy! Ride, ——for-leather!"

They splashed through the ford and up the first easy slope. There were sharpshooters posted on the lip of the bluff picking off the most daring of the Indian riders circling the hill and more than one bullet came uncomfortably close. Under cover of the low ridge, mounted Indians dashed to and fro showing themselves for but a second as they pumped shot after shot at the beleaguered white men above them.

They had almost won the crest and Peter Boyce was jubilantly swinging his hat when a sharp oath and shot from Ralph made him look again to the front. Seven Indians mounted on fleet war-ponies turned the hill shoulder to the left front a hundred yards away and were galloping along the slope toward them. The ridge sheltered both parties from the fire from the rifle pits. A sudden sharp yell from the leader followed the shot as they broke into instant pursuit and Peter Boyce flogging Mary Preston's pony with the end of his lariat, drove it straight up the hill with a warning cry.

A second shot from Ralph's ready rifle brought the leader down with a leg pinned fast under his dying pony but the rest swept on in full pursuit. Shot after shot came from the pursuers, but no one was touched. A final burst of speed brought the leaders abreast of Bates and Preston who were lifting their ponies at every stride.

The warrior nearest to Preston was armed with a knife.

He had dropped his rifle in the wild ride up the hill. He drove his horse close to the white man to get inside the thrust of the lance and sought to close for an opportunity to sink his knife under the shoulder bone. But he reckoned without Bates who rode knee to knee with Preston on the other side. Bates had dropped his ax to use his reins in the mad gallop up the hill but he still had a weapon that his opponent knew nothing of.

Quicker than a flash, with the malevolent grin of a demon, he reached across the croup of Preston's horse and swung that deadly left arm at the astonished warrior who saw but too late to avoid it, the rusty steel hook where the left hand should have been. It struck him fairly under the right ear and went home deep for Bates struck with all his force and gave a little grunt as a man does when he gives a good blow with an ax.

The Indian was fairly lifted from his horse by the terrific impact. He toppled and fell and, as though struck by the same blow, Iron-hook Bates fell with him across the prostrate body of his foe. The great hook had jammed in the bones of the head and for a moment he could not clear it. Before he could wrench it free, long before Tom Preston could whirl his crazy horse in an attempt to help his companion, three of the pursuing warriors had thrown themselves upon the prostrate man. The last thing that Tom Preston, looking over his shoulder as he topped the low ridge, saw, was three Indians struggling for the scalp while the two others awaited the outcome.

A moment later the four refugees dashed through the line of the rifle-pits and threw themselves from their exhausted ponies in the midst of an astonished soldiery.

"Who are you? Where are you all from? Where is Custer?"

The questions were fired at them like shots from a Gatling gun. Peter Boyce shook his head in answer.

"We can't tell you a thing," he said. "We were prisoners held in the camp yonder and only got away a few minutes ago. The Indians say that Custer has been wiped out. They promised to torture us and that aided some in our gettin' away. Can you put this young lady where she'll be safe from stray bullets?"

A place was found for Mary in the center of the camp near the hospital and the pack mules and during all that night and until noon on the twenty-sixth of June the Indians kept up a tremendous though nearly futile fire. It caused but few casualties. Toward noon heavy clouds of smoke rising along the base of the bluffs and in the valley showed that the Indians had fired the long grass. The blaze swept down upon them and around them in masses of spark-laden smoke that nearly choked them and through that smoke they were conscious of great bodies of moving men but they could not see what was taking place.

"Look there! Look, will you——"

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A SOLDIER touched Ralph on the shoulder as he stood fanning away at the smoke-reek with his hat trying to clear a lane through which he might be able to see what was taking place in the valley below them. Suddenly the smoke lifted like a huge blanket blown by the rising wind that always follows a prairie fire and the astonished soldiery saw below them, filing past the base of the beleaguered bluffs but too far away for rifle shot, the entire force of hostile Indians, warriors and women, children and lodges packed on ponies and on dragging travois with strong bodies of mounted warriors well out on both flanks and in the rear to guard the retreating column from possible attack. They were in full retreat for the recesses of the Big Horns.

It took that force six hours to file past the hill!

The rest of the day was spent by the besieged in recruiting exhausted nature. The wounded were looked to, wounds dressed, graves dug under the trees. Even yet they could hardly believe that they were to be left unmolested. Their first square meal of cooked food was had on the morning of Tuesday the twenty-seventh. While they were still preparing it a sharp-eyed sentry saw a cloud of dust rising against the northern sky, down the valley. A half hour later an officer came in with a note from General Terry.

Peter Boyce got the news and bore it to the little fire where Ralph and Mary were cooking flap-jacks in a frying pan.

"We're all right now," he shouted jubilantly. "Look! There's a big force comin' up the valley."

Ralph and Mary stared off into the distance.

"Say, Pete—" Ralph's tone was speculative, the tone of the born prospector. "If we get out of this mess we may be able to get back there to the Blue Bucket diggin's some day. Of course I've got a big enough pile now in what my uncle left me, but those Blue Bucket diggin's are right rich——"

Peter Boyce, old and very wise Ulysses, who had prospected many of the hills of the storied West cast a commiserating glance at his partner. He looked him over from head to foot as one examines a great curiosity.

"Son," he said explosively; "if I was sizzlin' like a piece o' fat bacon, in —— fire and old Doc Ives an' Little Bear was to come up an' give me a drink o' cold water and it was in a Blue Bucket—*I'd spit in it!* That's what I think of the Blue Bucket. They're here now! Glory be! We're all right now——"

Ralph looked at him, unbelievingly. He too was a prospector and he knew well that the memory of the wealth underlying the gravel at the Blue Bucket would eventually undermine every objection that was still fresh in the mind of Peter Boyce.

"Oh, you'll go back—some day," said Ralph comfortably, "and I'll go with you. How about it, Old-Timer——?"

"Humph—!" Peter Boyce shrugged his shoulders in indecision. "I—might—after a bit—who knows——"

The old man sat down on a near-by rock on which Mary had placed her scanty store of flour. Peter Boyce sat squarely in it and the wind caught the white cloud and blew it full in his face setting him to coughing. When he had cleared his eyes he looked up just in time to see Ralph Keene, his arm frankly around Mary Preston, whispering something in her ear.

"What ails *you*, you old pirate?" demanded Ralph in hot embarrassment. "What's the matter with you? You ought to see your face."

"I'd be in a —— of a fix if I *could* see it," commented Mr. Boyce testily. "I think a piece of weddin' cake has blowed in my eye."

THE END

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Author of "A Bit of Local Color," "The Picture," etc.

YOU couldn't hire old Bill Frendish to go yachting again in the best boat ever built with a Lloyd's rating equal to the latest Pacific liner. Not nohow. Frendish had skippered everything, from a Norwegian schooner to a park pickle boat, but since that business of the *Flamingo*, you can't get him over the side of a yacht to drink the health of his king in champagne.

Odd things happen in the China Sea; especially down in the southern waters like the Sulu group and in soundings off Borneo. It seems as if men who want to escape from civilization head away in that direction and are satisfied to finish in low latitudes with a forty-fathom grave. Best little place for shady deals in the world, what with plenty of small islands to hide in, narrow straits and uncharted channels, deep rivers from the bigger islands with mud-bars that shut out gunboats big enough to be any bother, and plenty of sea room if you want it.

You can hear this story in Zamboanga, Manila, Singapore or Hong Kong—and you'll never hear it twice the same way. That's for the reason that nobody knows the flat truth of it but Bill Frendish and me, and we've never taken the trouble to correct anybody when they told it the wrong way. And Frendish, well, he just won't talk about it any more.

There was a smart Aleck of a reporter in Manila who came nearer to the truth than anybody else—and he missed it by a mile and a cable length. I've always suspected he knew more than he printed. Sometimes these writing chaps do that, so somebody who knows will pop up and argue—and out comes the fact. Then the newspapers have a sensation, as they call it.

I was out of a job myself when Captain Frendish hit Zamboanga. He arrived in a native boat, wearing an old sugar-bag for a pair of pants. He'd just lost a brig in a typhoon in the San Bernardino straits and his Chinese owners in Manila left him high and dry on the beach after they had his reports to collect their insurance. He had a few dollars coming in Manila, but he couldn't eat off them very well. I gave him an extra shirt, and what we could borrow off a ship-chandler held us a few days and got Frendish something of an outfit.

We went down on the jetty one day to pick up a little gossip, and we saw the *Flamingo* lying at anchor not so far away but we could have tossed a biscuit into her. She looked smart as paint, and we saw a tall man in a white suit under the after awning playing "Rock of Ages" on a phonograph. That made us believe she was a missionary boat—she was too clean and smart for a trade-schooner. And after "Rock of Ages" we got "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and a lot more hymns and church tunes.

We had no more idea that we'd ever

"The Man Who Was Born Too Late," copyright 1921, by Frederick Moore

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get a berth with the *Flamingo* then than I have now of signing on as bosun's mate in an airship. The *Flamingo*, from what we could see of her, looked awful polite and ladylike, and we heard on the jetty that she belonged to some rich Englishman who was poling around the Sulu Sea and Borneo and Philippine waters making charts or something like that for scientific sharps in London just for the fun of it—or writing books about sea-serpents and the like of that, as we heard later in the afternoon. You know—these chaps who scoop up mud from a thousand fathoms or so and find blind worms in it that they give Italian names to that nobody can pronounce.

Then Frendish and me run into a square-head we knew who had a grass saloon up the beach. He used to tend bar in the Silver Dollar at Manila, and when we told him we were broke, he up and said we could have all the jaw-bone we wanted on grub and bottled beer. We'd been there ten days then and things looked bad for getting out, because there wasn't an inter-island steamer due for a month. So he put us up with army cots out in his little garden "Summer-house," and we called the place home.

"Py golly!" said Dutchy one morning. "Vat you t'ink I hears last night? I vas play pinochle mit a countryman, und der *Flamingo* iss vanting a sailing-master Porneo to go! Und de owner iss today here comming."

"Borneo! In the *Flamingo!* That's me, Dutchy! But I won't go and leave Charden here alone," says Frendish.

"You go, never mind me," I cried. "I'll get on all right. It's just the chance you need."

"Then I'll take a good advance and stake you," said Frendish. "But if I get the berth I'll do my best to take you as mate. If the owner is rich as I hear, a little matter like an extra mate needn't worry him. Besides, I'll make my wages low enough to include the both of us."

SURE enough, the owner of the *Flamingo* showed up that afternoon. He was a tall, well-set-up chap, quiet-spoken, with manners like a navy officer and a little red beard on the end of his chin like a bowsprit. His name was Shipman, and he wore all white and a white cap, and rather a ruddy face for a man who had been knocking about tropical waters for six years. He had gray eyes that showed he was not a man to cross, with a hard little line running up from the bridge of his nose that made him look as if he was thinking out something that bothered him. He was well past fifty, I'd say.

"You are likely to have a long job if you go in my schooner, Captain Frendish," he said. "I'll probably spend the rest of my life out here, and if you suit you'll have good pay and easy times. Too easy it's been for some of my masters, because I loaf round at sea and only come in to provision, and refit if necessary. I'm clearing from here for Banjermassin, but I may take three months to get there. I want to make some observations in the Straits of Macassar."

That didn't worry Frendish any, and it was fixed. I was to go as mate and in two hours we were aboard the *Flamingo* and living high. What surprized us was the style Shipman put on in his schooner. A couple of crack-up Chinese cooks and a Chink crew, which showed that Mr. Shipman cared nothing for expense, considering that there were Filipinos and Malays to be had for half the money. And the Chinks were picked men, too—big husky chaps who knew their business and went about it in navy style.

And such a table as the owner provided for the three of us aft! Silver and fancy glass and linen, with food that came from the whole world. That first night we had pickled chicken-combs done up in fancy bottles! I'd never heard of such things, unless among foreigners, and Frendish thought at first they were shrimps. And along of all that, wines were on for every meal but breakfast, and the Chinkie's cook's mate put out sandwiches for the mid-watch made of goose-livers! Fancy a mate in a schooner out in that part of the big water, eating goose-liver sandwiches! It looked queer to both Frendish and me—and it was queer, as it turned out.

Besides, the main cabin was done up in West End style. It had green velvet for the locker seats and cloth on the bulkheads with pictures woven in it out of colored threads—tapestries, you know, with kings and queens in 'em dancing while some duffer played a flute in a garden. Man, I thought I was in a music-hall that first night aboard!

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There was a teak gun-rack with a flat of rifles in it—best make and all that, with brasswork all over, and each rifle with its name pricked out with little brass tacks, such as Adder, Scorpion, Revenge, and the like of that. Why, with those repeaters we could have held off a boarding-party of a hundred Sulus or Malays.

On the teak deck-beams overhead there was some fancy scroll lettering such as monks used to put in books. I copied it off while I was aboard, into a blank, and this is how it read:

A Shipman ther was woned far by West,
He knew wel alle the havens as they were,
Fro' Gotland to the Cape de Finisterre,
And every creke, in Bretagne, and in Spaine;
His barge ycliped was the *Magdelaine*.

1 Banjermassin. 2 Celebes Sea.
3 Macassar Strait. 4 Laut Island.

Now who could make head or tail out of that but a parson or a writing chap? I supposed that the owner liked the rhyme because his own name was in it, but Frendish said he thought the Shipman meant sailor and had nothing at all to do with our Mr. Shipman. We've thought over that part of it a lot since we got shut of the *Flamingo*, I tell you.

We went out with the tide that night as neatly as a man-o'-war. That packet could sail, and the Chink bosun made things hum when he got his orders. I was in the bows as the anchor came home, and I looked aft. There was Frendish standing beside Mr. Shipman, who leaned against the cabin trunk smoking a cigar, a navy cap on his head. Here were the two of us, going off on a yachting cruise like a pair of swells, and that morning sleeping and eating on Dutchy's charity. It made me feel a bit creepy, as if it was all something like magic or *Sindbad the Sailor* or the *Flying Dutchman*.

There was the sun going down beyond Borneo like a bucket of blood and a sky you could have lit your pipe on, as the saying is, and we bound for nowhere in particular — Banjermassin, yes, but we didn't expect to make that landfall till after the new monsoon. I asks myself at the time, is it luck, or has the devil got us in tow?

The first course was due west for Kagayan Sulu, off the north of Borneo. We had a quartering breeze and slipped along like a pie-wagon for a fair. Then the second day out the course was changed south, to bring Cape Unsang dead ahead, as if to make through Sibutu Pass, off the eastern coast of British North Borneo.

Mr. Shipman was as nice a man as you'd want to sail with. No topgallant manners once we were to sea, except that he did seem to pray a lot before he went to bed. We could hear him in his cabin, saying it right out plain.

But he was real chummy otherwise. He had great bundles of books in lockers, and he read a lot—old books they were, of history and wars and fighting with lances. And I'd think he had all the books about pirates that ever was. He'd sit and pull that tuft of red beard on his chin and look up from his reading as if he was thinking. And one day he found a book he didn't like, for he came on deck and pitched it overside. He looked as he'd found something in it that he didn't like, too.

We'd made our southing into the Celebes Sea, going through Sibutu by daylight, and run into Dutch waters. And right after eight bells that night Mr. Shipman got out of bed, lit all the cuddy lamps up like a hotel and started the phonograph. That was all right for me—I was on watch. But

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Captain Frendish didn't get enough shut-eye by daylight to do him any particular good. He came on deck at dawn with a fighting look around his jaws, and squinted at the sun.

"This blooming packet," says he, "seems to be something between a roundabout with a steam band and a floating cathedral choir. I'm a religious man myself when things are going right, but I don't feel no more special need for sacred music the rest of this cruise." With that he spit into the Celebes Sea something vicious.

"I wouldn't mind it so much, sir," says I, "if he didn't get pious at night."

"And I miss my guess if that phonograph doesn't get sand in its bearings, or the heat melts some of the records," said the skipper, something coming into his eyes that showed he was thinking.

THE next night it was the same. My ticket, but Mr. Shipman did go it strong! I'll say it was enjoyable enough to stand watch with a circus orchestra going below, and a sleek swelly sea all about like solid silver under the moonlight and the *Flamingo* snoring along. If he'd only a-put on a jig tune or a popular song now and then, we might have felt better about it—but we got nothing but the same hymns over and over. The tunes got into my head, and I found myself humming "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war—" even when the phonograph was stopped.

Mr. Shipman never said much about it, such as to ask us if we were annoyed by the music. He slept mostly days, but when the moon was well up he'd start up the winch-wheels on his music-box.

We thought maybe he'd wear out the records in time. But we found that he had a locker full of extras in sealed tin cases so the heat couldn't spoil 'em. And the skipper didn't have the heart—or maybe the nerve—to tamper with the machinery. It didn't seem fair, after what Mr. Shipman had done for us, to interfere with his pleasures.

We worked down into the Strait of Macassar and Mr. Shipman took to spending his time on deck afternoons and spying at the islands we passed through an old telescope. And he began to shoot the sun and figure out our positions. He looked up every island in the charts, and read Sailing Directions—especially an old one, printed in London in 1800 or something like that. And all the time he was as nice as pie to both of us, and we lived like kings. And we had a couple of dark nights without hymns.

"I'm sorry," he said one evening. "It looks as if we'll have a moon tonight. That means I'll have to put on my sacred music."

The skipper gave me an eye.

"Moon, sir," says he to Mr. Shipman. "What's the moon got to do with it?"

"The moonlight down here stirs odd fancies in my head," says he with a funny little smile as he lifted a glass of port and looked through it. "You wouldn't understand, Captain Frendish."

Up comes the moon that night, like a blooming parlor lamp adrift in the sky, and on goes the hymns—and kept going till eight bells of the gravy-eye watch. The skipper managed to sleep with corks in his ears.

The next morning we went about, off on a new tack as if the owner'd given up all thoughts of making into Banjermassin. And that day he spent writing in a book. Come dark he finished and stepped out on deck for a look at the sky.

"Moon tonight, captain?" says he to Frendish.

I heard Frendish grit his teeth before he answered. Then he says, his voice awful tired, "In an hour, sir," and turned aside to say something under his breath.

"Will you bear a hand with me, Mr. Charden?" says the owner, and I followed Mr. Shipman below, wondering what was up.

"The phonograph," says he when we were below. "We'll take it up through the companion."

It was a bulky sort of chest and we lifted it up to the poop. And we moved all the records, too. I could see we were in for another musical evening.

We waited for the moon. We had Poolo Laut off our port bow, and when the moon was well up, the island stuck out of the Borneo coast like a sore thumb.

"Lay a course to bring Poolo Laut dead ahead, captain," orders Mr. Shipman.

Frendish turned his head and looked at me, as much as to ask if we were to climb Poolo with the schooner. But he obeyed orders.

Then Mr. Shipman started his phonograph and the skipper begins to chew his

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mustache. This went on for about half an hour, when the skipper breaks in on a hymn and says to Mr. Shipman sarcastic-like—

"Sir, is there any particular spot you want the schooner beached on Poolo Laut?"

The island, you see, was under our bows then, and before long our top hamper would have been messed in the trees.

"I did intend to beach her," says Mr. Shipman quiet-like, "but after all, I've decided not to. Go about."

Frendish and myself had about the same thought then—we were in the employ of a lunatic. I went forward to see to the headsails and we swung off and away from the land. When we were on the new tack and I was aft, Mr. Shipman stopped the phonograph right in the middle of a tune and says to me—

"Pitch that blasted thing over side, Mr. Charden!"

Then he grabbed it himself and hove it over the rail. It started going itself when he lifted it and by the time it struck the water it was going full blast on "Rock of Ages, cleft for me—" and it floated aft gurgling and grinding the water, with a word coming out now and then like a drowning man trying to yell for help while he smothered.

Then, in a fury, Mr. Shipman snatched up the records and pitched them after the phonograph, and they skewered along over the water, making phosphorescent ripples as they sank. Every blessed one of 'em went the same way, and with the last, Mr. Shipman bellows out—

"That's for the Duke of Montrose, and be —— to him and his ship's company of pirate-hunters!"

With that he goes below and slams his cabin door, and we saw no more of him the night.

The skipper had nothing to say and I held my tongue. We didn't know who the Duke of Montrose was and cared less. But I could tell from the way Frendish walked the deck that he would be looking for a new ship if we ever made port again. He went below and turned in along toward morning, after putting us on a course that should bring us to Macassar—a course without orders, which showed me he had made up his mind to something but didn't want me mixed in any blame.

After daylight Mr. Shipman comes on deck. I looked for him to change course, but he said nothing. We were well off the land and there was a schooner ahead.

"You'd better snatch a nap, Mr. Charden," said the owner. "I'll take watch."

He squinted over the shoulder of the big Chink who had the wheel, and turned to pace the weather side. Shipman looked rather pale around the gills and worn out, as if he hadn't slept enough. He had a towel tied round his head, with a corner dropping over his shoulder. Maybe he had a headache; but it did make him look as tough as the mate of a collier.

I was glad enough for a bit of rest. I could hear Frendish snoring away like a grampus and it didn't take me long to join the chorus.

I DON'T know how long I was asleep, but a shot woke me. I sat up in my bunk and listened. Everything seemed to be all right so far as I could judge, and I began to think I'd been dreaming.

"What was that?" I heard Frendish call, and then I noticed that my cabin door was shut—I'd left it open when I turned in.

I got up and tried to get out—the bolt was shot on the outside, and the bars were on. There were little lattice-works in the upper part of the door and I called to Frendish to let me out.

"I'm locked in myself," he said. "What the devil does this mean? Hello, Mr. Shipman!"

But Shipman didn't answer. We could hear him giving orders in Chinese to the crew, and then there came another rifle-shot.

"Heave to!" shouted Shipman from the poop, and then it struck me that he was speaking the schooner that was in sight ahead when he relieved me of the deck.

There came the rattle of blocks and sheets and we knew the schooner was changing tack. Perhaps we had run too close to the schooner outside and had avoided collision. I put my shoulder to the cabin door, but it wouldn't budge. Then I heard Frendish yelling for the cook to let him out, but never a word of answer from the little galley forward.

The next minute we felt the shock of a schooner bumping alongside, then a roar of Chinese voices and a scampering of feet, along with several shots.

"We've been boarded by pirates!" yelled

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Frendish, and with that he began to batter on the door of his cabin with a sideboard off his bunk.

But I pried my door off the hinges with an old calking iron that was in my room, and let Frendish out.

But we found ourselves prisoners in the main cabin. The storm-hatches were secured across the companion leading up to the poop-deck, and the door to the waist was double locked with big padlocks over steel straps. Somebody had bolted the storm-hatch tightly, and the wrench was not in sight. The gun-rack was empty, the brass clamps swinging open.

Frendish claps his hands to his head and looks at me. And all I could do was look at him, and listen to the fiend's own racket going on outside—yelling and slashing and shooting.

The sun poured in through the half-open skylight overhead, and then we noticed that there were old cutlases under our feet, and that an open closet next to the galley was really an arms-locker. It was from this that weapons had been flung out hastily and given, most likely to our crew.

"Piracy!" gasped Frendish. "It's piracy—and we stand to have our necks stretched for this!"

"What's that?" I asked, not understanding what Frendish was driving at.

But he didn't answer. Instead, he jumped up on the cabin table and stuck his head through the skylight, and I got up with him.

There was a schooner, fast alongside, and our Chinese crew aboard it, chasing and slashing at a crew of Malays and black boys. The schooner's bows were rolling against our after bulwarks, and as she lifted we saw her name—*Samarang*.

We saw Shipman aft in the *Samarang*, with a pistol in each hand, crouched outside the deck-door of the main cabin, as if waiting for somebody to come out. He had a red sash round his belt and the towel wrapped round his head, but he was naked to his middle. There was a dead man lying across the break of the poop, head down on his back and just behind Shipman—it looked to us as if Shipman had just shot him, and had turned to get somebody he knew to be inside.

Our Chinese crew had driven the blacks into the forecastle by this time and were hacking at the scuttle-board to get down at them. One of our Chinese was lying dead at the stepping of the main, and near by two natives who had tried to defend themselves with handspikes.

Then we saw a white man come out with a pistol. He saw Shipman and fired twice, just as Shipman let go at him—and they both dropped, Shipman falling across the stranger.

At this the Chinese set up a chattering and Frendish hove himself up through the skylight. I was right after him, and we bounded over the sides and ran to see if our owner was dead.

"Mr. Shipman! What's happened, in —— name?" cried Frendish, as he saw Shipman twist himself on one side and lift himself up on his hands.

He was white as death, and we saw that he'd been shot twice through the lower ribs.

"Call off the Chinks," gasped Shipman. "It's—all—over." He made a face that was partly a grin and partly a spasm of pain.

"Did they try to board us, sir?" demanded Frendish.

Shipman looked up at us, struggling for breath, his head swinging from side to side.

"No," he said, looking at the bloody deck under him as if trying to think. "We—boarded them."

"Do you mean piracy?" went on Frendish. "Is that what you mean?"

"That's what—that's what I intended it for. Look!"

He tried to point up over our heads behind us. We turned, and there we saw a black ensign, with skull and cross-bones in red, flying from our mizzen-gaff.

"A letter," says Shipman, "you'll find a——"

With that he blinked at the sun, drew a deep breath and gave a heavy cough that spilled his life out on the deck of the *Samarang*.

FRENDISH and myself just stood there, while the Chinese came clustering about us, gabbling among themselves. Frendish spoke to our bosun and sent all hands back aboard the *Flamingo*

"Mr. Charden, get that blasted rag down," says Frendish to me, "and fly a distress. We'll most likely all be hanged for what's gone on this morning."

When I got back to him Frendish had let up the black crew of the *Samarang*. The skipper and mate turned out to be

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Portuguese. They'd cleared from Macassar for Banka Island to get a cargo of block tin, and Shipman must have laid alongside 'em before they knew there was anything wrong, and rushed 'em. We got some of it from their *serang*, but he was scared so stiff he couldn't but just bark like a seal, thinking we had taken the ship and would kill all hands.

There wasn't enough wind to fly a kid's kite, so we just let the two schooners chafe together with puddings overside, while we talked things over and wondered what would come of it.

Along in the afternoon a Dutch gunboat came stewing along, and you never saw such a lot of puzzled geezers in your life. They about gabbed us crazy, and all but had us in irons.

Our Chinkies swore they supposed the *Samarang* intended to attack us. The first they knew Mr. Shipman had fired on the schooner with a rifle, gave all hands arms and ordered 'em to board the *Samarang* when he put the *Flamingo* alongside her.

The gunboat took us into Tanjong Priok, and then we went all through it again. Frendish and I were able to show by the Malays of the *Samarang*, and our own Chinese, that we'd had no part in the business. And the letter which we found in Shipman's cabin settled things for us with the Dutch. This letter read as follows:

To Captain Frendish and W. Charden, mate, both being of my schooner-yacht, *Flamingo;* and to whom it may concern, greetings—

You gentlemen, named above, engaged in my service at Zamboango, Mindanao, Philippines. At that time I hoped to be able to fight off the devil which has possessed me for many years. Now I know that I can not stand out against my own temptations much longer. It's a losing game for me, though so far I have managed, with the help of God, and the hymns on the phonograph, to restrain the desires which come over me while out in these waters.

Whatever I do, neither of the above-named gentlemen are in any way to blame, nor any of my crew. I can't understand why I'm driven to the crime I contemplate at the first opportunity, but some may find explanation of it in the fact that one of my ancestors, a William Shippemann, was a pirate. If you will look in the old book—which will be found among my effects in my cabin, and which is *The Oriental Navigator*, published more than a century ago in London, being compiled by a Captain Huddart, who was a noted navigator in early days in these waters.

If this thing which I fear does happen, you will both—in case you survive—find wages for six months due you with my solicitor in Singapore.

This thing grips my mind—I must turn pirate. I can not prevail longer. I wish to die upon the deck of a vessel which I have boarded and taken under the black flag. I take it that I was born a couple of centuries too late. I should have lived in the old sea-roving days, for the pirate blood in me gives me no rest in spite of the fact that my parents gave me a good education and a decent Christian upbringing. I am the last of my family.

Prayer has helped me, and the old church tunes, but the smell of these jungles and the moonlight of these nights, make me long for conflict and the devil in me comes to the top in spite of all I can do. But I presume no one will care what my inner feelings are on this subject. You may all make what you like of it, and as for the authorities, they may take a short turn to the devil himself. I'll give no quarter and ask none.

Signed at sea in the Strait of Macassar, this 24th July, 19— aboard the *Flamingo*. (See P. 189 *The Oriental Navigator*, being new directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, and New Holland.)

Wm. Shippemann, or Shipman.

We looked in the book, and on the page referred to, found this paragraph marked:

From Poolo Laut, all the way up to the Paternosters, foundings are found in a direct line, from 10 to 28 fathoms, clay ground or mud; and fometimes broken shells, and no danger from the Three Alike to the Paternosters. Oppofite the north end of thefe fhoals is Ragged Point, a low headland on the Ifle of Borneo. It was off thif headland that the notorious pirate, Wm. Shippemann, was taken by H. M. S. Duke of Montrofe, and hanged from the yardarm, July 24, 1732, later being caft into the fea off Poolo Laut in 58 fathoms water.

That paragraph was in the sailing-directions of the old book, for the Strait of Macassar, and we'd been traversing in there. When the Dutch turned us loose, we made for Singapore, and there were all kinds of yarns going when we got back to Manila. But we told the newspaper chaps to ask the Dutch in Batavia. We'd had enough talk about piracy to last us some time.

Frendish and I have talked over that matter of Shipman being born too late, and Frendish says a scientific sharp told him that there is such a thing, though I don't quite understand it. But Frendish swears he does—babies have been born with tails, and some men are born with minds that have the instincts that go with the centuries before we had the law and order of our day. Maybe that's the answer, but I don't want to ship with any more owners that have ideas in their heads like our Mr. Shipman. Nor does Frendish.

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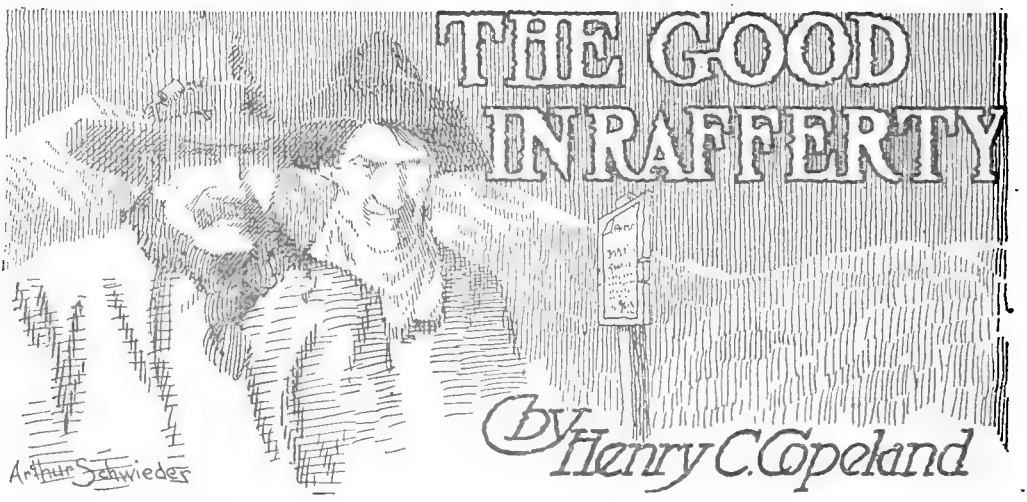

"THERE'S a great hour in the life of every man, sometime, no matter how worthless he may seem to be," said old "Sourdough Bill" Riley.

Bill and I had just finished the dishes in his little shooting-cabin on one of the great Puget Sound flats, our pipes were alight and the rain was dashing against the windows and the wind was soughing and whistling around the corners and down the stove-pipe. At such times old Bill's thoughts would turn back the wheels of time and in his stories he would live over some of those old days of the great Klondike gold rush.

"Now there was Rafferty—" A few clouds of smoke rose in the silence and then Sourdough Bill was organized and off.

"Rafferty was about as worthless a cuss as you'd find in a week's mushing, 'lessen it was that pardner of his'n, 'Slinky' Thompson. They were a funny team, best you could make of it; Rafferty, a big hulk of a roughneck, grew up south of Yesler in Seattle, and in the hardest lumber-camps of the sound; had about the same idea of morals and life as a huskie. Thompson was a Frisco, south of the Slot, product; and as for his morals I guess they were based on the bushmen's code.

"Seems that one time when Rafferty had come in to Seattle to have his blow-in at Billy-the-Mug's saloon, a bar-keep who had it in for him slipped him some knock-out in his hooch, threw him into the alley, gave him the boots a few times and left him. Rafferty was mighty near the shore of the dark and silent water when along came Slinky—true to his name. No one could guess what moved Thompson, but by promise of a drink he got a broke lumberjack to help him and they dragged Rafferty up to a hole that Thomspon called his room.

"For a week it was touch and go, but all Rafferty's parents had ever done for him was to give him an iron constitution and there was enough left of that to pull him through. From that time on Slinky was Rafferty's shadow, and Rafferty became Thompson's guardian.

"Then along one August day in eighteen hundred and ninety-seven, the steamer *Portland* landed at Seattle and the stampede was on. Rafferty and Thompson signed on as seamen on one of the hulks that went into the passenger business over night and deserted her at Skagway. For six weeks they worked and mooched around Skagway and Dyea, looking for a chance to get in with a big outfit and go down the river.

"To get on the good side of an outfit that looked favorable they had made a few packs up the summit of the Chilcoot. As they went by the little shanty that bore the sign, Canadian Custom House, one morning, they saw an order posted up that read something like this:

> Any person without 500 pounds of provisions or $400 in money, seeking to enter the Northwest Territories, will be turned back at Tagish House.
> (Signed) COL. R. M. STEELE,
> Commanding R. N. M. P.

"The Good in Rafferty," copyright, 1921, by Henry C. Copeland

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" 'Now how in ——' said Rafferty, using language which meant seventeen varieties of a refuge for wasted and misspent lives, 'are we goin' to get by those —— yellow legs,' as the Mounted were more or less affectionately called in those days.

" 'Guess we'll have to use som'uns else's outfits,' replies Slinky.

" 'Not for me,' says Rafferty. 'These guys up here's got a law which ain't on the books that says that the feller caught stealing from any one's cache, will just be hanged until real dead.'

" 'Oh, ——, Raff, lots more guys get away with it than ever get caught,' sneers Thompson. 'They ain't hanged no one yet, and a couple o' slick ones like us—we'd never get caught.'

" 'That slick ones stuff is all right,' snaps back Rafferty, 'but I am the guy that figures that he'll never have but one fatal accident, and hanging, to my mind, would be mighty fatal.'

" 'Aw, you don't think those Cheechako miners would hang a guy, do you'? asked Slinky.

" 'I ain't taking no chances on them Chechako miners,' returns Rafferty. 'Lots of them fellars look like regular he'uns to me. Guess it's me and you for regular jobs this Winter if we're going to pick them golden berries next Summer.'

" '——, Raff, me and you work regular'?

" 'Well, I don't like this work idea my ownself, but nix on that hanging stuff for me.'

" 'We should worry about hanging. Why, down below they can't get a guy hanged for even murder; d'ye think that these Chechakos would hang a guy for just takin' a little grub'?

" 'You take it from me, Slinky, and don't try that takin' game. I'll hunt us jobs.'

"Rafferty landed a job, night-swamping in one of the tent saloons at Sheep Camp, but Slinky still lived up to his name and nature.

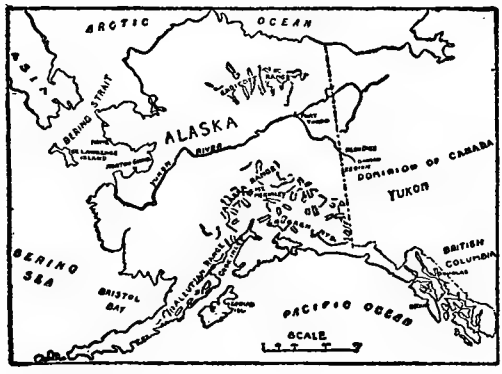
"AS THEY were looking round Dyea, sometime before, for a chance to get on the trail with an outfit, they fell in with 'Forty-Nine Andy.' Old Andy had been in every big gold rush from California to Australia and Africa and now was heading for the Klondike. Alone, he must have been seventy-five years old, on the trail every day, as early at work as the earliest, at it as late as the latest.

"Andy met Thompson and Rafferty one day and said:

" 'Boys, I've got quite a bit more outfit than I'll need to go in with and not much money. If you want to help me move my stuff up to the summit I'll furnish camp and grub for the three of us.'

"They took him up, and while the outfit had been on the summit for some weeks now, they were still living with Old Andy.

"All Winter, the Winter of eighteen hundred and ninety-seven and eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, the mushers were



moving their outfits up to the summit, where they were cached by just piling them up on the snow with a 'paulin tied down over them. My outfit we dug out three times and each time I could just reach the things up to my pardner standing on the edge of the hole when I was standing on a snow-shelf the height of the top of the cache. Some of the fellers lost their landmarks and didn't find their caches until the snow was nearly off.

"After one storm Andy went up to dig up his cache and when he got it all out more'n half of it was gone. The Forty-Niner was a foxy old boy and figured that if there was a 'stealer' at work there would be other stuff come up missing, so he says nothing to nobody but the miners' committee.

"The committee placed a man at the head of the trail each night to watch. After a couple of nights along comes Slinky. He goes to one of the caches that have been dug out since the last storm, loosens the 'paulin, digs out a sack, bacon it was, tightens up the 'paulin, packs the sack over to a cache way on the other side of the pile of outfits, loosens up the 'paulin there, puts in the sack, tightens up the 'paulin and heads down the trail.

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"Next morning the committee goes up to the summit and inspects the cache Slinky had went to. There was all of Andy's missing stuff and a lot more. Thompson had been takin' a couple of sacks here and a couple there, figurin' it wouldn't be so likely to be missed, excepting old Andy's he'd taken more'n half.

"Well, the miners' committee sent out word for a meetin' that night in the Horseshoe Saloon, the biggest tent in Sheep Camp.

"Figurin' that if Slinky was guilty Rafferty must be in on it, the committee arrested both of them.

"I was one of the four sent to do the arrestin'. When 'Nigger Jim' made the talk, what for we had come, Thompson turned a greenish yellow in color. Rafferty went white, then red, then white ag'in. Not a sound did he make, but the look he gave Slinky—we couldn't make it out then, but we understood it later.

"Not one word was said between Rafferty and Thompson all that afternoon. Thompson looked several times like he was goin' to speak but when he looked at Rafferty, he didn't.

"At half-past seven that night we brought them down to the Horseshoe. 'Big Bill' Allen was chairman and called the meetin' to order and stated the case. Man, but it was a sight. The big tent was crowded, men of every kind, from everywhere, every man hating a man who would steal from a cache, for that meant, perhaps, not life alone, but also his chance of getting gold. Flamin' gasoline torches made queer shadows and pictures on faces and canvas and in the minds of all death was present.

"Business of the saloon was stopped when Big Bill and the committee went up on the musicians' platform in the corner at the end of the bar. Usin' the butt of his Colt as a gavel, Bill rapped on the bar. The gabblin' died down to stillness. Then slow and solemn he boomed out:

" 'You, Rafferty, and you, Thompson, are charged by this here miners' committee with havin' unlawfully taken goods from the trail caches of Forty-Nine Andy and others, the same which, if you are found guilty by this here miners' meetin', is by miners' law, punishable by hanging. What have you to say, are you guilty or not guilty'?

" 'Slim Sam' Smith and 'Cherokee' Jones were obliged to hold Thompson up. He just caved in. Rafferty looked at Thompson, his face had turned a sort of dull gray, and was like it was frozen. From what happened here is the way we figured out what Rafferty thought:

" 'That poor heap of yellow there ain't even fit to be hanged. Besides, he did save my life, once. Then, I ain't been such a —— of a man myself. An' they got the goods on Slinky and I'll never be able to make them believe that I wasn't in on it. An' 'sides, maybe if Slinky had another chance he might make a little somethin' of a man yet—so, here goes.'

"With that Rafferty takes a step toward the committee and throws up one hand and calls out:

" 'Wait, men, I'm the really guilty one. Slinky here hasn't got the nerve to rob a rabbit and was scared to death to rob the caches, but I swore to cut his throat if he didn't, as we had to get an outfit together to get by the Mounted at Tagish. I been night swamping at the Old Home as a stall. Turn Slinky loose and make him go to work—it was all my doin's.'

"Then, before we could raise our hands, Rafferty grabbed Nigger Jim's gun out of the holster, turned facin' the crowd, which split in front of him, and just walked out of the door of the tent, put the gun to his head. The shot echoed up along the hills and Rafferty had passed his great hour.

"Thompson? Oh, they couldn't hang him after that, but they did strip him to the waist next day, tie him to a high stump and give him twenty lashes with a blacksnake. Then tied a sign on front and back, readin', 'Thief, keep him movin',' and a couple of the boys with Winchesters escorted him down to Dyea. A steamer was just leaving and as usual more'n half her crew had deserted, so Slinky was put to work firin'.

"Funny thing, when that steamer came in next trip, Slinky was still on the job firin'.

" 'Bout ten years later, when I came outside to stay I went down the river on the *Marjorie* and caught the Northwestern at St. Michael, I noticed a mighty smart lookin' chap goin' from the second engineer's state-room to the officers' mess. He looked familiar, but for a time I couldn't place him.

"What? Oh, yes, I finally made him all right—it was Thompson. Slinky had made good. Rafferty's hour had counted after all."

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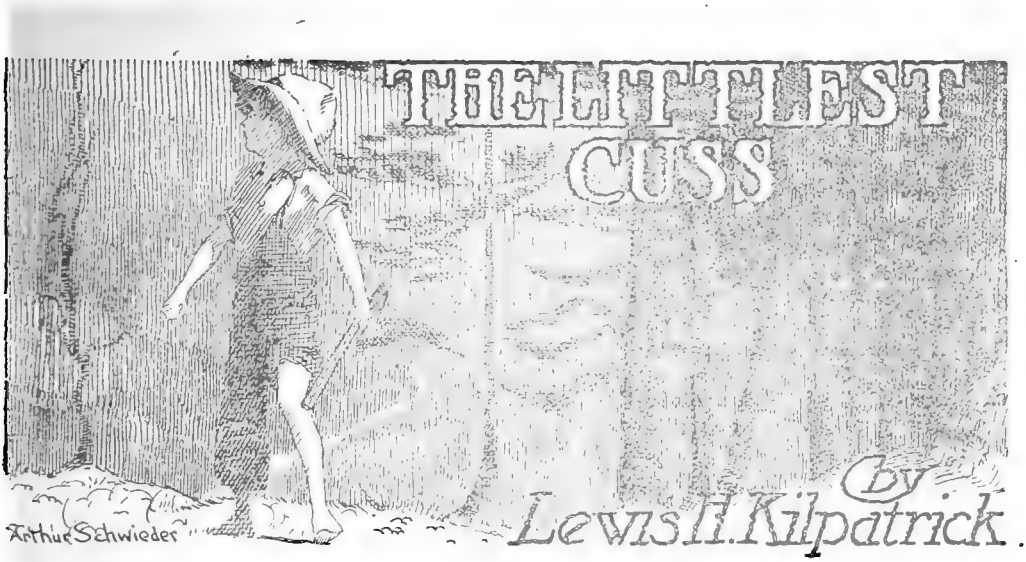

By Lewis H. Kilpatrick

Author of "Sentenced Without Law," "The Quality of Honor," etc.

JESSE GIBBS was a runt in that Kentucky country where nature has willed that both men and mountains grow tall. When he was a baby and interested friends inquired the health of the family, his father would drawl:

"Wal, ye see me fer what I am, six-foot easy and never sick a day in my life. My fo' boys they ain't got nothin' to complain of, neither. They air jest that strong and sassy that arry one of 'em kin whop the other three without breakin' a sweat. The old woman's a-pickin' up right smart too. But Jess—" the unlettered sire would shake his head— "Jess, he's the littlest cuss, ye know—and he ain't doin' no good a-tall. 'Pears like he's as puny now as the minnet he was born. His ma can't nu'se him much somehow, and we air feedin' him licker day and night to keep him alive. Naw, I 'low we'll never raise him; but we're doin' the best we kin, with the nighest doctor fifteen mile away."

In spite of this prediction, however, Jesse Gibbs survived infancy and even his four brothers. They, stalwart men of the hills, confident of their prowess as fighters, fell prey, one by one, to the superior fighting-powers of others. To their respective ends they pitied him his lack of warrior stature, shielded him as if he were still a child and thus denied him the right to carry any arms other than an old sawed-off double-barrel shotgun.

The butt of this shotgun now trailed the dust of the Campton Ridge road as Jesse, gripping the barrel near the muzzle, resolutely propelled his dwarfed body in the direction of the county's village capital. He had not confided the reason of his going to a single person, knowing very well that to do so might earn for him the fatal reward of a bullet in his heart. And while life had cauterized his sensitive soul with more than its share of bitterness, he was not ready to die until he had fulfilled what to him was an urgent mission.

Once he halted midway on the ridge and looked eastward, to where Parched Corn and Swift's Creeks twisted through rock-walled gorges to their parent Red River. His milky blue eyes clouded and the nostrils of his stub nose inhaled a long breath.

"Boys, I hate to do hit," he muttered. "Ye all have deviled me and plagued me a heap, but ye don't mean no harm. Hit's the stuff ye air makin', not ye, that I'm agin. But I'm agin hit, shore! Hit's a sin and a damnation to ever' young'un in these mountings—and I aim to have hit stomped out."

Still trailing the shotgun at his heels, he reached the village of Campton at noon and, disregarding the plank sidewalks, kept to the middle of the street from force of habit. The county seat, formerly a noted feud center, had of late years felt the stimulation of an oil boom, ornamented its few stores with artificial stone fronts and

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erected a flame-defying brick court-house.

Jesse went straight to the court-house square, but lingered on its outskirts before the main entrance. There, with true mountain patience, he leaned on his gun and waited, scanning the faces of those who sauntered in and out of the building. Unusual figure that he was, he attracted little attention, for in a country where individualism is developed to the extreme extraordinary folk paradoxically are ordinary.

A good two hours passed, and then his blue eyes fixed themselves on a tall, muscular man who appeared at the court-house door. The man was plainly alien to the hills, and the expression of his features was not complimentary to his present surroundings. He stood a moment at the doorway, scowling about the almost deserted square; then, flinging up both hands in a gesture of disgust, turned and entered one of the county offices.

Less than a minute afterward, Jesse following him, also crossed the threshold of the apartment, unannounced by so much as a knock. The man had dropped into a chair behind a desk, and in another chair near-by sat a second man, reading a sporting journal.

"Ain't ye Mr. Rankin?"

Jesse rested the shotgun butt on the floor and his chest was barely on a level with the desk-top.

"Yes, that's me," replied the big man, still scowling. "What do you want?"

Jess jerked his head toward the reader of the sporting journal.

"He's Mr. Howell, ain't he? And both o' ye air marshals, from down below, come up here to raid moonshine stills?"

Howell and Rankin stared at him doubtfully, uncertain whether to affirm or deny the latter charge.

"Aw, ye needn't be afeerd o' me," Jesse assured them, grinning. "I knowed what yer business was afore I axed ye. Ye all were over on Red River last week, spyin' 'round, and ye stopped by Aunt Sally Gabbard's fer yer dinner. Jest afore ye come, I clumb up her chimney to tear out some swaller nestes that had been pesterin' her; and while she was in the kitchen I heerd ye talkin' easy-like togither in the room below me.

"One o' ye 'lowed, 'This here's the best spring-fed country I ever seen.' Then the other says, 'Yas, and atter we feed the law to the 'shiners at some o' these springs, maybe the chief'll let us leave this —— fersaken beat.'

"Hearin' that," Jesse added, "I knowed that ye weren't in our parts to fish, like ye made out to be. So I clumb up on to the roof and watched to see yer faces when ye rode off. That's how I come to find ye today, Mr. Rankin, fer I figgered that ye'd be stayin' somewhar nigh the co't-house here."

Neither officer was much disturbed by his knowledge of their identity. This was their first trip to the Kentucky hills—both swore that it would be their last—and they despised everything about them, from their greasy table fare to the indifference of the county authorities, who had grudgingly lent them this room.

Rankin leaned across the desk, with a brusk nod.

"All right, bub, we admit the charge," he said. "We were sent up here to clean out every still in this county, and we're going to do it. I didn't get my three stripes on the Cincinnati police force for nothing!" He whacked the desk top with his fist and smiled grimly. "Before the end of this week I'll have enough deputies shipped in over that dinky Campton railroad to comb these mountains to the last valley. Then I'll teach you hill-billies what it means to break the law—and I'll teach you in a way you'll never forget!"

Jesse's tanned face darkened.

"I feel about hit jest like ye do, mister," he declared, "but ye got to be keerful. Furrin deputies don't know this heré country, and I counsel ye to git fellers who do to help ye with yer raidin'."

"Why are you so interested?" broke in Howell.

"Hit's this way, mister," replied Jesse, looking squarely at him. "I owes all my troubles to moonshine licker and I hate the name o' hit. When I was born, I was so puny that my folks give hit to me to keep me alive. They was that unknowin', and thar wasn't nobody to tell 'em better. Years atterward they larned that so much licker will hinder a young'un from growin'—but they larned hit too late fer me. I was a runt and nothin' could make me taller."

He hesitated, for the confidence came hard.

"That's why I hate the pizen," he continued, "and hankers to see these hills shed

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o' hit. Hit's all right fer growed-up folks to drink hit maybe, but I don't want no more young'uns made like I am. I know what hit is to be jest mule-belly high, and have ever'body shame ye, and p'int ye out, laughin', and treat ye as if ye were a varmint—yas, I do. Hit's ——!"

Rankin and Howell exchanged amused glances, but Jesse did not wait for them to speak. Lowering his voice, he went on earnestly:

"I kin lead ye to ever' still in my part o' the county, day er night. All ye got to do is foller me and we'll destroy 'em. That's what brung me here to have speech with ye. I'm a-goin' to be one o' yer deputies."

"One of my deputies!" echoed Rankin. He sank back in his chair, laughing. "Why, you young shrimp, I want men on my posse. I'm not running any foundlings' home. What do you think still raiding is, a nursery game?"

His heavy body shook with chuckles, and beside him Howell gleefully whipped his knee with the sporting journal.

"That's the best one I've heard since coming to this hole!" he exclaimed. "A dwarf in the revenue service! P. T. Barnum, front and center!"

Angry color flamed in Jesse's cheeks. Gripping the shotgun tightly, he drew back from the officers, his chin quivering. But pride stifled the hurt cry that bit at his lips and he controlled his fury.

"I—I'm twenty-eight," he stammered. "Hit ain't my fault that I can't tech shoulders with other men. I'm jest made this way, that's all. And when I offers to help ye git shed o' what done hit, I'm a-sidin' agin my own folks and a-riskin' my life."

Rankin shrugged contemptuously.

"Well, we won't let you put your fifty-four inches in danger," he snapped. "You hill-billies are as crooked as your creeks, and I don't trust a one of you. More than likely you planned to lead us into an ambush. Oh, I know your breed!"

He pointed to the door.

"That way out, bub. Drop in again when you can't stay so long. And remember, I do my raiding with six-foot men, not runts. Savvy?

Hatred, wounded pride and something else flashed from the blue eyes that a few minutes before had proffered only friendship. But, without a word of retort, Jesse turned and left the office, dragging the shotgun after him.

WHEN he reached the street, he did not go the way he had come; instead, he made straight for the northern edge of the town, branched off from the main thoroughfare and took a trail that led downward through wooded ravines to the head-waters of Swift's Creek. Somewhere along this stream, according to Kentucky traditions, was the silver mine which the pioneer Swift had worked to his profit and the mystery of succeeding generations. But those who worked there now, behind coverts of laurel and fallen boulders, minted their dollars from corn and buckeye and spring water, supplying liquid merriment and deviltry to that entire region.

Of these was black-whiskered Nat Oaks, who, bending over a tub of mash while his two partners dozed a few yards away, was unaware of any presence but theirs until he heard a low chuckle at his elbow. Instinctively he straightened and threw up his hands. His rifle, at that unguarded moment, was out of reach.

"Ye're a fine 'shiner, ye air!" mocked the newcomer. "Thar ain't a ole woman in this county that couldn't take ever' one o' ye prisoner, if she was minded to."

The hands came down and Nat Oaks grinned with relief.

"Why, howdy, Jess!" he exclaimed. "I thought ye was a revenuer. Grab up that cup thar and ile yer innards. The drinks air on us."

The little man sobered.

"Thar air revenuers in these parts, all right."

Nat also became grave.

"Now ye're foolin' me shore 'nough," he accused.

"Naw, I ain't. Jesse spoke in a whisper. "Atter ye-all git done with this run, ye'll have to quit fer a spell."

He jerked his thumb southward.

"Thar's two revenuers in Campton, and them and their men air comin' over here the fust o' next week. Don't ax me how I know. I do—and that's a plenty."

"By gosh!" Nat glanced about hastily. "Jess, ye air a heap better friend o' ourn then I ever thought fer. What ye say strikes me sorta sudden. What do ye counsel us to do?"

The reply was prompt:

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"Jest hide yer still and go to yer homes. Pertend like ye air law-abidin' farmers, and don't have no trouble with them revenuers. Let 'em come and let 'em go peaceful. They ain't the kind that'll do much damage.

"And, Nat—" Jesse eyed him keenly—"recollect that hit was me that warned ye. Tell them drunken fellers thar and all yer friends that hit was me. Maybe I'll be axin' a favor o' ye sometime, and I'll want ye all to grant hit."

The moonshiner laid a grateful hand on his shoulder.

"We'll see that ye're took keer of," he promised. "Nat Oaks ain't a man to fergit a favor. Whatever ye ax o' me atter this, I'll do. I give ye my oath on that.

"But, Jess, ye'd best have a dram afore ye go," he insisted. "A leetle un won't hurt ye."

"Naw, thank ye, I reckon I won't."

And Jesse, satisfied, did not tarry longer.

SLIPPING through the screening laurel, he again took the trail. He reached another streamlet, followed it to its spring, and there found what he expected to find. To Nat's fellows-at-trade he repeated his warning and advice; and then went on to the next still, and the next, and the next.

Before midnight that very day every moonshiner on Swifts and Parched Corn Creeks knew that Marshals Rankin and Howell were at Campton, marking time until the arrival of a posse from the "settlements." They also knew that, after the end of the week, all stilling would have to be suspended in that region; and were impressed with the fact that they owed this information, their liberty and possibly their lives, to Jesse Gibbs. For he had never failed to say—

"Maybe I'll be axin' a favor o' ye sometime, and I'll want ye all to grant hit."

And each moonshiner, inheritor of the mountain sense of gratitude, replied in substance as had Nat Oaks:

"Whatever ye ax o' me atter this, I'll do. I give ye my oath on that."

The causes of their perturbation, unfortunately for their present efficiency as officers, did not look beneath the hillman's slouching shoulders for his heart or try to gage the cunning brain behind his often dull, unintelligent face. Both Rankin and Howell had received their training as city policemen and they believed in employing open and strong-arm methods in enforcing the prohibition law in the Kentucky Mountains.

When they descended upon the Red River country they had at their backs a goodly cavalcade of urban deputies, booted and khaki-clad and heavily armed. They made little secret of their coming. Riding lowland horses that slipped and stumbled over the mountain trails, they searched by day and by night. They explored every creek and branch to its source, ransacked every deserted cabin and closed in on each suspicious thicket and cane-brake as if it were a German "pill-box."

Yet, somehow, all such choice stilling-sites seemed to have been overlooked by the moonshiners of that country. At one place the posse did find a heap of ashes; at another, a piece of copper coil; but not a single outfit could they discover, nor any man who had so much as a liquor breath.

"Naw, thar ain't been no stillin' done in these parts that I kin recollect," a native would answer when cross-questioned by the marshals. "I have heerd my pap tell o' 'shiners bein' in Pike and Bell County in his day, but that was thirty year ago. Naw, strangers; I reckon ye'll find more o' that sort o' goin' on down in the settlements then ye will up here."

With few exceptions the questioned man or woman accompanied these remarks with a bland smile, concluding:

"Won't ye all git down and come in? We ain't got much to eat, but we'll be pleased to give ye what we have. Them critters o' yourn look mighty wore out, too. Let me take 'em 'round to the barn and shake 'em down some feed."

Howell and Rankin were in no humor to accept hospitality from folk to whom they had sworn to teach the full letter of the law; but such cordiality had its effect upon them.

"—— it!" exclaimed Rankin, "these hillbillies are either the smartest liars in all creation or they've been terribly lied about. In a civilized community you'll find a few crooks in every gang who can be bought or bullied into squealing; but up here they're all virtuous as angels or else clannish as ——. I don't know which. What do you say, Howell?"

"I think that they aren't near as rotten as we've been made to believe," Howell

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answered. "We've turned every creek bed and valley inside out and haven't a worthwhile clue yet. Not a still, not a moonshiner, not a person who's more than heard of liquor. I'm for going back to Campton, and wiring the chief. This kind of business is making a wreck of me. We're on a cold trail."

But the posse did not go back; at least, not until one of their horses had fallen into a gully, breaking his own leg and that of his rider, and half the other horses had gone lame. Then, saddle-sore, worn, baffled, and famished for urban food, Marshal Rankin turned them toward Campton.

AS THEY climbed to the top of Campton Ridge those in advance spied what appeared to be a boy, clad in homespun and armed with a shotgun, standing beside the road.

"Whar air all yo' six-foot men goin'?" he called, even before they halted. "Mr. Rankin, don't ye want to borry a few wagons to haul yer captured stills? Ye ought to have some rope, too, to tie up yer prisoners."

The big man glared down at him from his saddle, but some of his deputies snickered.

"I'm a-tellin' ye the truth, boys," Jesse continued solemnly, "ye've jest about tromped me to death. I never 'lowed thar was so many cricks and hollers in these parts ontil I begun to foller ye all.

"Yas," he added, intercepting Rankin's question, "I've been a-trailin' 'longside o' ye day and night. Ye didn't see me, o' course; but I seen ye and ever'thing ye done. I wanted to kinda look out fer ye, since ye ain't young shrimps, and keep ye from puttin' yer seventy-two inches in danger. Savvy?"

Not a twinkle lighted Jesse's blue eyes, his wizen features were almost expressionless, but every nerve and muscle of his dwarfed body was taut. The shotgun, instead of being at trail, was held across his chest, and the finger of one hand was conveniently near the triggers.

Rankin secretly writhed under his sarcasm, but the last few days had taught him many things. Leaning forward over his horse's neck, he forced a smile.

"Say, bub, do you want that job you asked me for last week?"

Jesse seemed surprized.

"A runt in the revenue service—why, mister, I 'low that with all these furrin deputies, ye don't need a hill-billy to help ye clean out ever' still in this county. A feller that's crooked as a crick ain't to be trusted, noway."

His lips curled with a sneer and his eyes hardened.

Rankin murmured a command, which caused the rest of the posse to withdraw a short distance and leave him alone with Jesse.

"See here, bub," he began in an undertone, "I know when I'm bested and when it's wisest to swallow my own words. Just because we've failed in this raid, doesn't convince me that we got a bad tip. Now I'll make you a business proposition: if you'll join us and lead us to the stills in this country, I'll give you fifty dollars for each outfit we capture and twenty-five dollars for each moonshiner. What's your answer."

Jesse shook his head.

"I can't do hit atter the way ye and Mr. Howell treated me."

He shifted his gun and spat on the ground.

"But I'll tell ye the trade I will make with ye," he said. "Stop yer raidin', send them furrin deputies back whar they come from, and in two weeks I'll be callin' at the co't-house with somethin' to show ye. What's yer answer to that?"

Marshal Rankin considered, realizing the uselessness of pressing his own proposition or of trying to get Jesse to explain his farther.

"All right," he agreed. "I don't know what your game is, but my offer stands and I'll give you a chance. Then, if nothing comes of it, —— if I don't resign this job and go to raising turtle doves.

"Men," he shouted, "let's be moving on!"

JESSE had too little faith in "furriners" in general and Rankin in particular not to make sure that the marshal had kept his part of the bargain before he attempted to keep his. By that infallible system of verbal telegraphy, however, which the hill folk have developed, he soon learned that the imported possemen had left Campton for the Blue Grass. After their fruitless excursion into the Red River country, they did not ride that way again; nor did Howell and Rankin, during the next fortnight.

Nevertheless the thoroughness with which they had searched the hills served as a

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warning to the moonshiners. They were in no hurry to disinter their stills and resume operations. Time meant nothing to them and caution was the better part of their business. Thus when Jesse Gibbs called on them, one by one, with what seemed a peculiar request, they listened, interested, and for want of anything else to do, promised to meet him on the date and at the point he named.

Mountain men assembled together, if friendly and sober, find entertainment enough in each other's company. So it was at the trysting place, on the Campton Ridge, when the moonshiners kept their promise to Jesse. He sat on a log in their midst, the shotgun across his knees, listening to their gossip and banter, but taking no part in it. Grim determination drew his features and, in spite of his meager height, his poise marked him as a leader among them.

When all the men had arrived, he mounted the log and they gathered about him.

"Boys," he said, "I done ye a favor oncet and ye all swore that ye wouldn't fergit hit. I know that ye sorta looks down on me, 'cause I ain't growed; but now ye got to confidence me. Don't ax me no questions. We air goin' to Campton afoot—and that's all I kin tell ye ontil we git thar. Ever' feller o' ye has his pistol, I reckon; so ye needn't be afeerd. Jest come along peaceful, and recollect that ye air doin' hit fer me."

All his auditors wondered and some hesitated, but not a man of them held back.

"Leetle fellers like him al'ays air short o' sense," commented one moonshiner in a whisper.

"Yas," admitted bearded Nat Oaks; "but we ain't had no fun fer a right smart spell and I 'low we owe hit to him to humor him. Anyway, hit can't do us no harm."

The ridge road was without a dwelling for its whole five miles, but along the main road nearer to Campton were frequent cabins and box-houses. Mountain farmers, working on the slopes with their women, saw the strange company and paused, curious. Occasionally they recognized a friend among them, and called—

"Hey, Pete, what air ye fellers up to?"

"I dunno," was the honest reply.

Again:

"Jim Slade, ye ornery ole cuss, whar air ye leadin' that army? Is thar a war goin' on somewhar?"

"Thar shore is," came the retort. "We air goin' to take Campton, burn hit to the ground and throw the ashes in the crick. But don't ye tell nobody."

"Howdy, Nat! Why, I ain't seen ye since I bought that last jug o' licker offen ye. Ye boys must be wrong in yer figgers; this ain't Co't Day. What's takin' ye to town?"

Nat answered truthfully—

"Jess Gibbs here, that's all."

On reaching the outskirts of the village all jollity ceased and the party halted abruptly. The sun was hot, the road had been long and dusty, and the venture suddenly assumed a serious aspect as it neared its climax.

"Jess, what sort o' devilment air ye gittin' us into?" queried one cautious moonshiner. "I don't like the looks o' hit myself."

"Field Simpson, if ye air that big a coward, git on home to Parched Corn. I ain't a-hinderin' ye."

"Yas," muttered another, "but we ain't give to hoss-play when hit takes us so fer from home and so nigh the sheriff. I 'low we got a right to know jest what ye're about."

"Aw, don't go back on the leetle feller!" broke in Nat Oaks. "Thar's thirty-fo' o' us and we needn't be skairt. We kin whop all Campton if hit comes to that. I'll foller ye plumb inside the co't-house, Jess, if ye say so."

And when they entered the village that was exactly the direction in which he led them. Some of the moonshiners protested violently, but there was enough sporting blood in the company to overrule them and prevent their retreating.

As they passed along the streets, Campton's citizens stopped and stared at them, alarmed. The women and children, after a hurried, appraising glance, sought shelter in the nearest houses, while the men backed against fences and building-fronts, there to hold their ground and their tongues. Business was temporarily suspended, and doors and windows were hastily barred. The town constable, hiding behind a lumber-pile, pocketed his badge and threw away his gun. For not since the old feud days had such a formidable force trod the dust of that county's capital.

Rankin and Howell, at their office, were

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spending one of numerous boresome afternoons, when the shuffling of many feet in the hallway aroused them. Neither had time even to reach to the desk for his .45 before the door opened and in came Jesse Gibbs, trailing his shotgun and followed by some thirty-odd brawny but half-frightened mountaineers.

The two marshals looked and gasped.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Rankin, springing up. "What's this, a mob?"

Jesse, standing where he had before, in front of the desk, slowly grinned.

"Naw, mister, they ain't no mob," he drawled. "They're jest them 'shiners that ye was talkin' so big about ketchin'."

The mountaineers, lining up close to the walls, were dumb; but their keen eyes were fixed on the trio.

"Well—well," stammered Rankin, regaining some of his composure, "I guess you want your reward, don't you? Twenty-five dollars a head and—um—" he counted them— "thirty-four head. Whew, that's a pretty good graft!" he exclaimed. "But before we pay it, bub, we've got to have more proof against them. No Federal jury would convict so many on your testimony alone. Will any of them turn State's evidence?"

The grin vanished from Jesse's lips and a snarl bared his teeth. His short body trembled with long-suffering fury.

"I don't want yer furrin money, not a cent o' hit!" he cried. "I wouldn't sell these 'shiners to the law now fer ever' dollar thar is in Kentucky. Oncet I offered to be yer friend and side agin 'em, but ye sassed me and shamed me. Ye laughed at me fer bein' a runt, and called me mean names, and tole me to git out o' yer room. Oh, I recollect the speech ye used—yas, sir! And now I'm jest a-showin' ye revenuers what a sawed-off feller with a sawed-off shotgun kin do. I aim fer ye to know that I am a man, even if I don't look hit, and that I've gone and done by myself what ye and all yer six-foot deputies couldn't do!"

He choked, tried to go on, choked again, and a tear trickled from each blue eye down his cheeks.

Howell and Rankin stood as dumbly as the moonshiners, confronted by an embodiment of bruised mountain pride, powerless to make a militant move toward them and just as powerless to answer his passionate outburst.

"Now, ye 'shiners, I'm a-talkin' to ye," recovering his voice, Jesse turned on the semicircle of stolid faces. Self had to be vindicated first, but he did not forget his larger purpose. "Ye ain't nigh as big fools as these revenuers make ye out to be," he went on steadily, "and, when hit's put up to ye fair, thar's not a man among ye who won't listen to reason. At fust I 'lowed that the only way to stop ye from traffickin' in licker was to destroy yer stills. But since I've favored ye and ye've favored me, I've larned that ye've got kind hearts and plenty o' sense—and yer hearts and sense kin lead ye to behave better then all the revenuers and jail-houses in this country.

"Boys, fer three weeks now, because ye had to, ye've kept away from stillin' and been law-abidin' citizens. Ever' one o' ye has a passel o' land, ye know how to tend hit, and ye kin trade in hosses and hawgs and cattle. Work as hard at farmin' and swappin' as ye have at stillin', and ye'll make jest as much money. Ye never heerd o' the sheriff arrestin' a man fer hoein' 'taters, did ye? O' course ye haven't. And did ye ever hear o' revenuers raidin' a hawg pen? Naw, ye ain't!

"Wal, what I'm a-drivin' at is, ye'll be the bunch o' fools that I 'low ye ain't if ye go back to moonshinin' now that ye know the law is agin hit and that the law kin send enough men up here to raid and jail the hull county. Fer if ye do go about yer deviltry ag'in, the revenuers air shore to find hit out and git on yer trail. This time, boys, ye got off free, 'cause I warned ye; but next time I ain't goin' to warn ye, even if I 'spicions a raid, and the chances air that them o' ye who don't fetch up in prison will leave widders and orphans to mourn ye in the graveyard. Hit's sartain to happen, and if hit does ye'll have only yer own selves to blame. Have ye studied about that?"

Jesse paused, scrutinizing the expressions of his fellows. Their stolidity was broken by laboring emotions, caution battling with age-old defiance, common sense struggling against a love of undisciplined freedom. Thirty-four pairs of feet shifted uneasily on the floor, but here and there was a frank nod of approval.

"I'm axin' ye fust to think o' yerselves and yer own safety," Jesse continued, "fer some o' ye can't be teched in no other way

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and none o' ye air crazy enough to keep on makin' licker when hit's shore to git ye into deep trouble. But now I'm axin' ye to think o' somethin' else." He braced himself to meet their pitying gaze.

"Look at me, boys; look at me hard!" he commanded through clenched teeth. "Is thar arry one o' ye who'd swap places with me? Is thar a man here who's got a young-'un he'd want to be what I am?" His voice shook again. "Boys, ye know why I'm this leetle and ugly. Ye know why I can't hunt and fight and have fun like the rest o' ye, and that thar ain't a gal who'd 'low me to co't her, let alone wed with her. I ain't a-sayin' how hit hurts to be a runt. Ye kin figger that out yerselves. And I ain't seekin' to tell ye how of'en I've crawled on to my bed and cried like a whopped dawg 'cause I'd never be any better. Naw! What I am tellin' ye is that as long as men traffic in moonshine licker and folks air ignorant, what happened to me is bound to happen in these parts frequent. Not that I'm preachin' at ye er a-speakin' fer the law, but all the money and fun ye kin git out o' yer jugs ain't worth one po' helpless young'un that's been cheated out o' growin'. Study about that a minnet too, boys."

A COMMON wave of feeling swept over the encircling faces, for the mountain heart warms to those who know how to kindle its fires, and reason is stronger than force in controlling the mountain brain. Though unlettered and primitive, the fiber of Old England was an inheritance of even the most outlawish among them and the undiluted sturdy blood of pioneer America washed their veins. For a minute there was silence in the room, broken only by heavy breathing, as each man waged his individual fight and thought his own thoughts.

Nat Oaks coughed and nudged his neighbor.

"By gosh, Mack!" he whispered. "Maybe leetle fellers ain't short o' sense atter all. Thar's a heap o' virtue in what Jess 'lows. I never seen hit jest that way afore. And I reckon I could make a good livin' out o' farmin'."

"Leastwise hit won't git ye into trouble," agreed Mack. "I've been in a jail-house oncet, and hit shore is ——!"

Another mountaineer spoke across the room to a friend:

"Jim, ye've got two mules and I ain't got none. How'll ye trade one of 'em to my ole sow and pigs?"

"Ye're too late," Jim responded, grinning. "Pete here's jest axed to buy the mare mule fer cash money, to start out plowin' with in the mornin'. He and me ain't takin' no more chances on gittin' mixed up with the law," he added. "Seein' what happened here o' late, makes stillin' too risky. We air done with sech business, plumb through and done, now and fer al'ays. Yas, sir!"

A chorus of grunts applauded the statement.

Rankin and Howell watched and listened, marveling at the scene; for never in their official lives had they witnessed its like. The mountaineers seemed utterly unconscious of their presence. Howell saw this, and, with a cunning leer, slipped nearer the desk.

"Boys, ye kin wait ontil ye git home to do yer tradin'," spoke up Jesse, and gestured toward the door. "I reckon we'll be gittin' on thar now, since I've done all I sot out to do here——"

Howell, with a quick hand, grabbed a .45 Colt from the desk.

"No, you won't," he snapped. "Not that easy! We've listened to your hypocritical chatter, but now you're our prisoners. Put up those fists!"

"Stop, you idiot!"

Rankin, as quick as his brother officer, clutched his wrist and wrenched the Colt from him, just as the walls about them became suddenly alive with other revolvers, pointed toward them. And above each was a mountain face, alert and determined, promising certain death.

"I got him, Mr. Rankin; turn him a-loose."

Less than a foot from Howell's stomach gaped the double mouth of the shotgun, Jesse's fingers on the triggers.

"These men air my friends," he declared, unperturbed. "I brung 'em here and I'll take 'em away. Because they confidenced me, I'll pertect 'em. Their heads work slow, but they ain't give to bein' two-faced; and when they take a notion to do what's right, they air able to stick to hit without no help from ye er any other furriners. I believes in 'em and ye've got to. Savvy?"

"Git on out o' here, boys," he ordered

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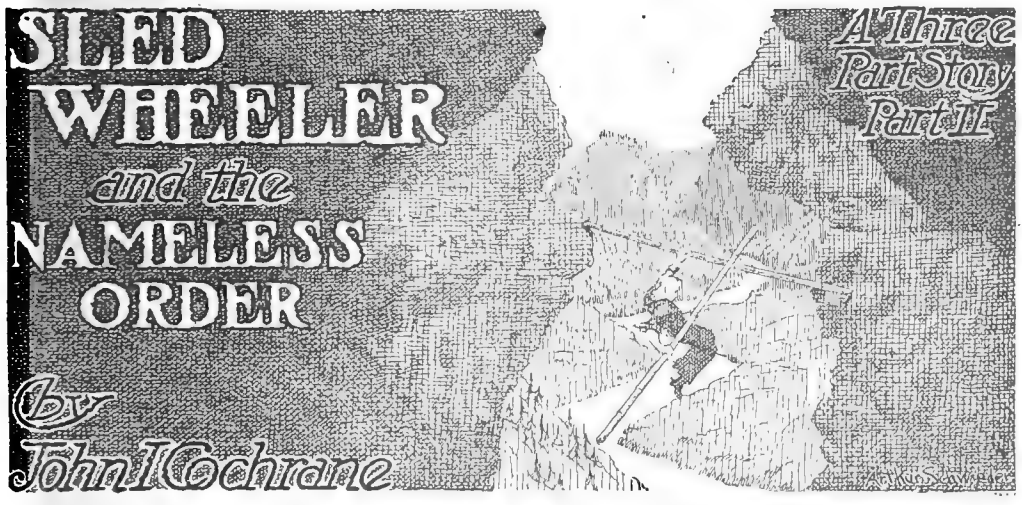
over his shoulder. "Don't start no trouble. Ye air peaceful farmers now, not 'shiners, and ye're goin' to keep clear o' the law. I'll take keer o' these revenuers."

Slowly, but trustfully, and with new-born respect for their protector, the former moonshiners filed from the office. When the last one was gone, the threatening muzzle lowered. Howell, his features dripping cold sweat, looked at Rankin; and Rankin, feeling more oaths than he could ever utter, looked at Howell. The next moment both looked to where Jesse had been—but he was not there now, and the door, swinging open, showed only the empty hall.



Author of "Dan Wheeler—Manhandler," "The Swinging Mirrors," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

DAN WHEELER, adventurer—for such was his chosen profession—was stopped one morning while crossing the lobby of one of San Francisco's leading hotels, by a titled young Englishman, Lord Brendon, who informed him he had a message of importance to deliver from Drake, an old pal of Wheeler's.

In the course of conversation Lord Brendon confided to Wheeler that he had invested all his money in a mining property in which Drake was interested, and that they were attempting to get a clear claim to it but could not on account of certain holdings owned by a man named Garth.

Brendon soon learned that Garth was a brutal and notorious political boss who had long terrorized the district, and was in some way connected with a mysterious secret society.

After receiving Drake's message Wheeler took Brendon with him at night to visit Lu Yan, a Chinese merchant who lived in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown. Drake's message concerned two priceless Asiatic jewels, which Garth was determined to obtain possession of by every means in his power, and Lu Yan warned Wheeler that his life was in danger on account of his association with Drake.

Dan, however, refused to be intimidated. On the way back to his hotel he was attacked by one of Garth's "stranglers," and, in a barehanded fight, choked his opponent to death.

When Garth received news of his failure to do away with Dan he decided to nullify Drake's influence by taking Wheeler into his employ, and offered him the job of manager of the Cascade Club, a gambling joint, connected with the hotel, which he ran. Dan accepted, but before taking over the job managed to tell Senator Sands—the friend of all who desired law and order in the community—that Garth was getting dangerous, and would stop at nothing to attain his own ends.

That evening while Dan was handling the crowd of gamblers, Garth received word that Drake, whom he was expecting to bring the jewels to the city, had been robbed. Violently excited, he immediately left the hotel with Wheeler and Brendon to discover what had happened.

At Dalton's ranch they found that Drake, who had not been robbed at all, was merely visiting Dalton, his friend. That night Garth offered Drake not only a large sum of money but all rights to the mining property in exchange for the two jewels which were still in Drake's possession.

Drake, however, refused to give an immediate decision. To safeguard himself for that night he obtained the services of Koloi, an Indian whose life he had once saved. Having stationed Koloi at the door of his room, he went to sleep.

The whole party was awakened the following morning by Garth, who, in a frenzy of excitement, told them the Indian had disappeared—and that the jewels were missing.

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CHAPTER VI

WAKE up—roll out—get up! Are you dead a week?"

Garth was shaking Dan's shoulder savagely—punching him—dragging at the blanket. The Boss was wild-eyed and his long hair was tousled over his face—his teeth showed in a vicious snarl as he pushed his face close to Dan's:

"Do you know anything about this? They're gone! Hear? Both the jewel-rolls are gone—missing. Where are they?"

"Lay off!" Wheeler swung Garth aside and sat up. "What you hollering about—are you crazy? Who ever heard of a jewel-roll?"

"Somebody made off with them in the night." Drake spoke from his bed, which he was pulling apart and searching systematically. "The jewels were in two metal boxes—each in a leather roll—and both the rolls are gone from the bag."

He indicated the satchel on a chair. It stood open and Garth returned to it in the intervals of clawing wildly about the room and Dan's bed which he was now dragging apart in frantic and futile search. He was not yet enough awake to think connectedly, and he wanted to vent his exasperation on somebody.

"Get up and hunt! Don't stare like a stuck hog," he shouted, hauling at Dan's mattress. "It's the Twins, you fool!"

"That's the mattress, you fool," Dan retorted, "that you are hauling on like a crazy puppy. You act like a maniac—if they're stolen the thief didn't hide 'em here!"

"Just what I told him," Drake interposed, "but he went into this fit the instant he found out the bag wasn't under my head. I must have slept like the dead."

Drake was sensibly getting dressed. Dan got into his pants.

"The Indian is gone!" He suddenly pointed to the open window.

Garth almost dived through it in his rush.

"He's got 'em and gone!" He darted for the door and ran into Dalton.

"Easy on!" Dalton caught the frantic man. "Koloi left a plain trail—a darn queer performance if he wanted to get away, but he's a queer Indian. He took a horse and headed up the Bridge Cañon Trail some time before daylight. But Luke Wood is after him, on the roan stallion, and he can't get away. Might as well take time for a bite and a cup of coffee while the boys saddle our horses. Come and get it—it's ready."

"That's your grateful Indian!" Garth snarled at Drake. "The man who would give his life for you! You put him up to it, and Wheeler was in it. You two are in cahoots—you ——— ———"

"Choke it off or I will!" Dan caught Garth's arm in a grip that made him flinch and grimace. "You can't pay me enough to take your foul talk! Get together and talk sense—this is the last time you lash *me* with your filthy tongue. I give you fair warning here and now!"

Garth's oaths stopped short and he got himself under control with an effort, but he turned to Drake and asked in a voice that shook—

"Did you hire that Indian to steal those stones?"

"What would that get me? Man—use some sense!" said Drake with cool contempt. "Come and get some breakfast and you'll find your head will clear up."

In a sullen silence Garth followed the others to the table, and as he swallowed whatever came to hand he kept his black, closely set eyes on Drake and on Wheeler by turns.

Drake ate his breakfast like an old campaigner with deliberation and relish. Only once he addressed Brendon, who looked worried.

"Don't fret, son! It will all come out right."

And at that Garth looked for a moment as if he were about to break out again. When they left the table and went out into the ranch-yard the Boss faced Drake once more with a nasty threatening sneer.

"Now then, I want to know just what you think you're going to do!" and turned to Dalton with—

"You expect you're going to catch that red skin after all this time wasted?"

"It looks to me like it's Mr. Drake's property we're after," Dalton said calmly. "I take my orders from him."

"You know what is best, John," Drake said quietly.

"Well then—we'd better keep together as far as Lower Cañon. If Koloi has gone up the cañon, part of us can go round by a better trail and we'll meet at Kinney's Hollow. He will have to come out there too. After

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that it will depend on which way he has gone. If he's gone up Bridge Cañon we've got him bottled up; if he's gone down the valley——"

And he finished by a shrug of his wide shoulders.

The horses had been brought round and were waiting. They mounted and made a start, with Dalton in the lead after he had waited to see Wheeler mount Jonah. It may have put Jonah off his form to be in strange company—the other three were picked animals from the ranch; good horses well broken—for after a brief waltz he permitted himself to be boarded and sedately followed his new friends.

He felt obliged to show his independence by a brief session of sunfishing when he was reined at the turn of the trail, and when he had simmered down Dalton reined abreast to say to Wheeler—

"You have sat a cayuse before."

Dan only slanted a narrowed look at the big ranchman and reined back to allow him to go ahead, which he did with a shrug.

Wheeler had not said a word since his tilt with his employer, who now came alongside and growled—

"See that you go with me when we divide."

"Sure! We are Siamese twins!" Dan answered caustically.

In those days the Siamese twins were the latest symbol of inseparable union.

For two long hours, while the sun came up and became hotter and hotter, they rode up the rising trail at a walk or a lope. The three saddle-sore tenderfeet gradually softened up, and with their relief from suffering became more cheerful by slow degrees.

Presently Wheeler began to have trouble with Jonah. Jonah shied at everything and nothing—kicked at Dalton's horse and appeared to see a devil behind every bush and rock. His every move, however, seemed so timed and placed that it crowded Dalton from the path or caused him to dodge flying heels.

"Say!" Dalton pulled up frowning. "If you can't handle that brute, why don't you ride behind?"

"I ride where I——please!" Dan slipped from the saddle to look at his cinch. "If you don't like it you can do the next thing! This saddle slipped—what sheepman cinched that on?"

He knew the term was an insult, and he tickled Jonah's ribs.

"Quit that!" Dalton again dodged Jonah's heels. "Are you looking for a fight?" in a lower tone.

"Told you so last night," Dan growled. Then louder—"If you fixed that cinch to throw me you need licking!" Leaving Jonah's side—"Get off your horse!"

"Here!" Garth called sharply—"What's the—— Break away there!"

But they had already clinched with enthusiasm. Dalton was a six-foot athlete in the pink of condition, but Wheeler was Wheeler—a past-master in all forms of handling his fellowmen. More particularly, at that time he was the most skilled ju-jutsuist in America—for it was a science little known.

Brendon thought he heard Dan muttering in Dalton's ear as they tugged and strained desperately.

In a few strenuous moments Dalton came heavily to earth—landing with a force that jarred out a prodigious grunt.

"Unh!" He looked up into the business-like face of Wheeler, who sat astride him waving a gun—Dalton's gun—by the barrel and threatening his skull with the butt thereof.

"Now then—I'm a gentleman and a horse-wrangler, or I crack your nut!"

But his thin lips had a curious curl at the ends as he finished.

"Say it!"

"Sure—you're anything you say," Dalton grinned.

"And you can't cinch on a saddle."

"Never could."

Although Dalton sobered at once Garth had got a glimpse of his grin and went white with vicious anger. Here were these two men actually delaying the pursuit and making fun of him indirectly.

With an oath he sprang at Dan and caught the gun he waved carelessly. There was another struggle and the weapon discharged—the bullet plowing between the feet of Dalton as he got up.

"You didn't make it, but you tried hard enough," Dan said in a low, deadly tone to Garth as he wrenched the gun free. "That is twice, and three times is out. Here's your gun, Dalton—I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it," Dalton said good-naturedly; but he was a bit pale from a narrow shave as he turned away from the ugly sight of Garth's murderous face.

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"Listen to me, Wheeler!" Garth rasped in his whispery rattlesnake tones. "You're a fool if you're still trying to double-cross me—no man ever crossed Ghost Garth and got away with it alive!"

"How long do you think I am going to stand for these stage-threats of yours?" Dan asked comparatively pleasantly. "You are getting amusing! I took you for a grown-up man, Garth. Stop playing fool yourself and see what happens. I am ashamed of you!"

Garth mounted without another word. Probably it was the first time he had ever been met by ridicule, and he was white around the mouth with rage—perhaps with the beginning of fear. At any rate he rode all the remainder of the forenoon without another word to anybody.

JONAH was a model horse from that time on. The party made much better time. The sun got higher and hotter as they wound along the slowly mounting trail until a little before noon they reached the rocky bluff that marked the entrance to Lower Cañon.

Here they found waiting for them Luke Wood, Dalton's foreman, and the stallion, cropping grass in the shade of the bluff.

He had a fire going to make coffee and he greeted them:

"Light and eat—if you brought any grub! Yes—he went up the Cañon—afoot and leading the horse. He can't get away this side Kinney's Hole—we got him, sure. He used to have more sense. What's the matter with the boy?"

"That's what I don't know." Dalton frowned. "I been figuring on it all morning."

"Maybe he's going to climb all the way through Bridge Cañon on his climbing-sticks," Wood suggested.

"Still it looks foolish—we can head him off easy by going to both ends from Kinney's," Dalton insisted. "Let's eat and get on up to Kinney's Hole—we want to make it before dark."

All the clear afternoon they rode—getting higher all the time and getting more gorgeous views of the huge mountains and desert-lands at their feet. As the sun sank to its far-off rest the country became a giant fairyland of richest colors, from the farthest gray-white sand of the plains, up through deep purple shadows at the base of frowning bluffs, the broad scale of misty colors swept in endless vistas.

The purple dulled to blues that merged in gray and olive, mounted to yellow reds and fiery gold where the sun rode down—and slowly plunged into his couch—leaving the backlash to glow from fire to rose and crimson. Even the cow-ponies seemed subdued by the rich majesty of the setting in which they moved.

It was deep dusk before Garth wailed hopelessly—

"How much farther?"

"Not any—just around that bluff. Better let me ride ahead," said Dalton. "They know me, and they might be nervous."

Garth instantly fell back. The Kinney brothers' record included activities frowned upon by law. Not all chance visitors were welcome at their highland estate. Here they herded their few head of stock on their grassy plateau, prospected betimes, and did other things to make life bearable. Jonas and Adam Kinney, however, went respected—even admired—by those who knew them.

In the falling dark Dalton rode slowly ahead until the *smack-wheu-eu-u* of a bullet on a rock was punctuated by the crack of a rifle. Dalton's hands went up and he called out:

"Dalton! And friends!"

"All right—it's gettin' dark. Come on up!"

A horseman rode out from behind a rock and spurred to meet them.

"Glad to see you, John," he welcomed the big ranchman.

"Can you put up five of us, Jone?" asked Dalton. "You know Mr. Drake—he was here last Summer." He named the others in order.

"Easy! Glad to have a chance to talk to a white man. Adam came back from 'Frisco like a sorehead grizzly. Come on up to the shack."

"Have you seen my Indian, Koloi? That's what we want to know first-off." Dalton asked while the others held their breaths. "He slid out with some loot and we're after him."

"You got him. Adam saw him the other side of the ridge—he went up the cañon. He'll den up tonight and you can head him off in the morning. Come in and we'll talk it out lengthways, up at the shack."

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The shack proved to be a large and comfortable log cabin, where they found the younger Kinney helping their man get supper. Adam was introduced, and grinned pleasantly.

"I came out on the train with you—only I rode farther." He flushed through his tan. "I met his lordship and Mr. Wheeler—they treated me white at the Cascade Club."

"By Jove! You're the plunger!" Brendon wrung Adam's hand with cordial delight. "Sorry you had hard luck."

"You gave me a square deal—and twenty-five to get home on," Adam said gratefully. "And it was worth the money, to play with a real sure-enough gentleman."

"You can even up at poker," Dan put in. "He has bum luck at poker."

Thus it came to pass that after the elders were in an early bed to be prepared for an early start, Adam and Brendon and Wheeler played before the fire in the log cabin.

"Did you say you could talk his language?" Dan asked, speaking of the Indian whom Adam admired.

"A little. I have known Koloi quite some time, and he's white and square. Are you sure he stole the stuff?"

"Why? What did he say about it? Talk low!"

"He said the Silent Chief—Drake—told him to take two rolls of hide and take them to the Gold Cave. He was to leave them there until Drake came or sent him a token," Adam said quietly. "What's in 'em?"

"M-mm!" Dan looked at Brendon. "I had a hunch all along—you remember I was fooling with Dalton?—I thought Drake wanted to give the Indian a good start." And reverting to Adam's question: "Diamonds—worth a million, perhaps. Promise you'll keep it close."

"Sure—I'm with you. What's it about?"

"I'll tell you—but first, how about this Gold Cave? How does he——"

"I can tell you," Adam interrupted eagerly. "He has two peeled poles—took 'em with him and left the horse with me—and he swings from the poles, hand over hand—you never saw anything like it! It looks almost impossible and takes the nerve of a tight-rope walker! I am——"

"Don't tell me about it—makes shivers run up my back!" Dan said. "You asked about the sparks—the jewels. Listen—Drake has agreed to deliver them to somebody in the city and Garth is bound to get 'em. He—Garth—is trying to squeeze Drake and Brendon on this mine-business to force Drake to sell the stones. See?" The cards were forgotten in their tense interest.

"Mm-hm!" said Adam. "But I thought you were working for Garth?"

"I am, but not a minute after I want to quit—and I quit the instant he puts the screws on my friends, Brendon and Drake. Meanwhile I can keep an eye on him all the better. Get me?" Dan asked sharply.

"Sure! I'm with you—like I said—all the way. But we want to take along my bamboos when we go to the cañon," said Adam. "I got 'em in the city, to use like Koloi uses his poles—first chance I got. But don't tell Jone—he thinks I'm crazy—and maybe I can show you a trick or two when we get in the cañon. Lemme tell you——"

Adam illustrated the way the Indian traversed the blank spaces in the path up the cañon, where the upright walls offered not even a handhold for some distance—high above the rocky bottom where the river dashed and dived underground below the bridge. Adam knew all about the mining claims, also, and was enthused at once by the prospect of the contest for the jewels.

"It's better than something out of a book!" he cried. "Count on me to back your play to the limit and beyond. Let's play until it's time to wake 'em up— No! I forgot—you got to sleep."

He got up abruptly.

"I was a fool not to think of it before—but I didn't know what depended on your hunt. You got to sleep!" he repeated; and nothing could move him.

Dan and Brendon finally had to give up the game, which had hardly started, and go to bed.

CHAPTER VII

ALTHOUGH it was dark and cold when Dalton shook them awake in the early morning, Brendon insisted on going for a shower-bath to a little cascade he had heard splashing not far from the cabin. He dared Wheeler to go with him and the two set out with a lantern, and towels made from meal-sacks.

The water was liquid ice that stung and

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benumbed the skin where it struck. Brendon howled and puffed, while Dan gasped through set teeth; and on the way back they were still blue and shivering.

"This b-b-bally American water—t-t-treacherous s-s-stuff! At home it would be properly frozen, don't you know, and one would know what to expect," he stuttered through blue lips. "You W-w-westerners d-d-don't——"

"Lay off!" Dan shouted as he tackled low from the rear, and the two rolled and pounded on the grass until they came in flushed and blowing.

On the way Dan confided to his lordship:

"I have about got—what-d'you-call-it—about fed up with this Garth and his lip. I have a hunch this is my last day as his hired man, and it will feel good to tell him about it!"

"It certainly sounds good to me," said Brendon, "to know you are on my side—I shall not do much worrying from now on."

"We'll fix things pretty near right, I shouldn't wonder," boasted Dan.

And food vanished before them like frost before the sun.

The plan for their trip to Bridge Cañon was to divide into three parties. One, mounted, to take the longest tour round to the lower end of the cañon; the second, also mounted, to go by a still harder trail to the top where the natural bridge spanned the chasm near its middle; the third, afoot, was to enter the cañon at its upper end. Here Garth objected, of course.

"I want Wheeler to ride with Drake and me to the lower end," he said.

"I don't ride a horse today," stated Dan. "Jonah has a holiday."

"What d'you mean?" Garth scowled.

"I go afoot. Walk on my own two legs—like this!" And he started for the door, saying over his shoulder, "Besides, we shouldn't know the trail," as he went out into the dark to join Brendon and Adam.

"He's right, Garth," Drake said. "Dalton can guide us as far as the mouth of the cañon, then go up top with Luke Wood. That leaves the three boys to go to the upper end afoot."

"Anyway, they have started already," Dalton announced as he came in grinning. "So we'd better be moving."

Garth muttered sullenly as he followed the others, and the start was made in the darkness—not even a lantern was carried, because it would soon be light, and the horses would follow the trail.

Adam Kinney led his party—Brendon following and Dan in the rear.

"How do you follow the path?" Brendon asked, lifting his feet high.

"By the feel, mostly. I can't see like a horse, but it will be light pretty soon. ——!"

There was a clatter in the dark.

"Don't you fellows want a pole apiece? Four is two too many, and they get between my legs faster'n I can pull 'em out."

The bamboos were seven feet long and made excellent alpenstocks; also they were useful in feeling the way in the dark. Dan was congratulating himself that he was not in the saddle.

"Next time I mount Jonah," he announced, "I am going to hang over on my stomach like a sack of meal."

"What you need is some real riding-breeches," Brendon stated.

"I see myself!" Dan snorted. "And once Jonah saw 'em— He has a strong constitution but I don't guess he'd recover. Wouldn't be the same horse ever again."

There was a brief silence, before Dan broke out:

"By Henry! Wouldn't it be something scandalous if your folks could see you now? *Walking* in riding-breeches! I don't guess even the British Constitution could stand up under the disgrace—what? I bet you'd be fired—couldn't hold your job for a minute, don't you know!"

"When it gets light enough I'll crack your head with this quarterstaff," Brendon threatened.

They were three boys on a tramp, and Dan was the youngest of them at the moment.

"If a Hinglish quarterstoff is *height* feet long," he started in a nasal singsong, "'ow long his a ruddy *'ole* one—don't you knaow?"

And without waiting for an answer he continued, talking to himself:

"Some club—this same quahtahstahf! Took a husky guy to handle one. He could belt a whole lot of earls in a day—enough for a mess."

Then in deep chest-tones:

Perfectly ripping sport, old chap. Awfully jolly—what!"

"You are certainly feeling fit this morning—ought to bathe oftener!" Brendon retorted.

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"Wait until he sees the cañon!" threatened Adam with a grin. "That will take the kinks out of him."

And he knew whereof he spoke. They reached the head of the cañon about the middle of the forenoon, after a climb through rocky ravines where they got glimpses of spacious and wild distances below them. The depth of the narrow gorge took Brendon's breath away, while Dan got white about the lips.

The path entered half-way up the side of one wall, along a narrow shelf of rock, and standing on this shelf they could see down the cleft for almost half its length.

It was hardly more than two or three yards from wall to wall—more like a crack or fissure than a water-worn channel in the living rock—but it cut through a spur of the huge range of mountains for a depth of two or three hundred feet. It was dark and savagely gloomy, breathing a wet, chill menace upon any bold mortal who ventured within its dank jaws.

Far below—so far that they shrank from the depths in horror—an icy stream plunged and foamed. Its rushing came up softly muffled by the distance. They stood close and whispered as if in a dim cathedral, while Adam pointed out the strange features of the place.

"It's wider at the bottom," said he. "But these sticks will reach across 'most anywhere up here. Down beyond there, where the walls seem to come together, is a bend or elbow where both walls turn. The path stops there and the walls are straight up. Just around the corner is another short shelf under the opening to the Gold Cave—then another space of straight-up wall before the shelf and path begin again.

"So you see nobody can get to the cave without using the sticks or poles—and no white man has ever done that, or been through the cañon. I believe *I* can do it—by gum!"

"What about a rope from above?" Brendon asked.

"They tried it—one man got killed," said Adam. "The cave is under the bridge, and loose rocks slid on him when he tried to swing under. They never found him, for the water dives underground just beyond the corner there!" He added, "It could be done with timbers to shore up, and rope enough——"

"Bbrr-r-r-r!" Dan shook himself as he protested, his face white and drawn. "Don't let's talk about it! Don't let's look at it! Takes the starch out of my knees! Do you guess that Indian is in the cave in there?"

"Can't be anywhere else—no place to go—unless there's a crack or cranny somewhere along the path, and there ain't. But he most generally sleeps in there until about noon. When the sun strikes in it dries the walls and his sticks stick better—aren't so apt to slip—I figure it these bamboos will hold as well or better, and they're lighter to swing. Lemme show you!" Adam was absorbed in his project.

He went ahead a few paces to where his rods would span the chasm and a bit to spare. Breathless, Wheeler watched him place a rod across at a slant from wall to wall—the near end higher—and pull down his end until it bound tight.

Then with hands quite close to the wall he swung his weight on the rod—only partly over the path.

"Get off—get off it!" Dan shouted hoarsely. "Whoo-ee! Not any—not any in mine!" He shook himself and looked like a trapped wild thing. "Let's get out of here—get in further—do something! If we stay here any longer you'll see me hit the high spots on the back trail. I always did get dizzy—even on a step-ladder!"

"One of us better stay here anyhow." Adam did not smile. "Brendon and I can go ahead to the break in the path—we can shout to the others round the bend. They ought to be there before long."

"No—I got to settle this thing right here!" said Dan grimly. "Let Brendon stay here. Drive on! Only don't say anything sudden. Give me your pole, Brendon—I need all the help there is."

"You'd better go ahead," Adam counseled. "If I see you wabbling I can steady you with a pole. You can reach across with your poles to the other side if you——"

"No!" Dan shouted. "It sends shivers all up my arm just to hold the stick over that d-d—— Come on, and keep a-talking to me. I wish I was in somebody's cellar, sitting flat on the bottom and holding on with both hands."

The start was made slowly, but Dan soon passed back one of the bamboos without turning his head.

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"You carry this—I need that hand to hug the wall—keep talking to me."

"You'll get my goat if you keep on!" Adam grinned. "I never saw such a——"

"Go on—say it—just so you keep talking." Dan had no false pride left.

He was all jelly-shivers at the start, forcing himself to take one step at a time with his eyes on the path and wall close beside him. He soon found, however, that he was still alive and making progress. He was beginning to feel that he might possibly get out alive.

After some more steady progress he managed to reach out with his pole and touch the other side of the cañon—this held him firmly on the shelf, and from that point on they made fair speed. At times it was necessary to flatten themselves close to the wall and use the pole as a prop against the farther side.

When they finally reached the end of the shelf, where the path ended, under the loose rocks that formed the bridge above and shut out all view of the sky, Dan found himself looking straight down the dark echoing gorge to the mist and foam so far below, and he was tempted to sit down on the end of the shelf and hold on with both hands. His knees felt wabbly and a return of panic threatened him.

"Here we are at the end, and you did fine," said Adam. "It's about time those fellows got here—it's only a little ways around the corner to the cave, and the path from the other end stops just like this one—on the other side. Listen. Hello there!" He stopped for a moment.

"No. They got farther to go. You can almost hear a whisper from around there when they do come. Sit down a minute, so I can get over you, and let me take your pole." He was over and beyond Wheeler even as he spoke.

"You're not going to try to break your—all your bones?" Dan asked.

"I want to see how my bamboos work." Adam was placing them across the gorge, the near end higher, and wedging them tight. "Shut your eyes if you like."

He swung his leg over, and sitting astride the first two poles he placed the next pair farther out. Dan held his breath and watched, fascinated, while young Kinney kept on—legs dangling into the bottomless chasm—delightedly proving his invention.

"They work bully!" he exulted. "Just as *easy!*"

He had reached the jutting angle of the wall, and placing a pole for a hand-rail he peered round the corner, calling softly—

"Koloi!"

A low guttural rumble answered, and Adam spoke again.

"He's in there with the rolls, but he won't come out until he gets orders or a token from Mr. Drake," Adam said, casually working away at his rods on the return trip. "He's got grub for two days. I could reach the little shelf under the cave from the corner—almost. It's dead easy!"

He was back on the shelf beaming and triumphant, looking down at Dan.

"What will we do now? Wait for the others, from the other end?"

"Hoooo!" Dan let out his breath in a long sigh. "Yes—let him alone! I didn't get my wind right, all the time you were on those things."

"And you—Dan Wheeler—let a little thing like that scare you to a plumb frazzle!" Adam grinned at Wheeler's white face.

"Not looking at you, so much as thinking of *me!*" said Dan grimly. "I got to do it now!" And he waved Adam to pass him. "Gimme the —— things!" Dan used cuss-words very rarely.

Adam passed him the bamboos, his grin gone in an instant. He felt instinctively that it was no time to talk, and he watched with a face as white and strained as Dan's had been. It was a fearful thing to attempt, for a man who was made dizzy by heights, and young Kinney looked on with frightened admiration.

Once in motion Dan worked with the smooth swiftness that marked all his movements—with catlike precision and deftness—keeping his eyes and mind on the work close at hand. He made the same trip that Adam had finished, but came back after one look round the angle, saying never a word until he was seated once more on the path. Then he leaned back against the rock with:

"There! I'd rather ride Jonah to New York!" and closed his eyes.

"By thunder!" said young Adam. "You never will do anything to beat that if you live to be a million. My hat's off to Sled Wheeler!"

"I hope not," said Dan. "I am going to sit here all day."

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"Then I'll go back and see if Brendon wants to go up to the mine."

Adam spoke with hushed reverence:

"You'll hear 'em when they get in from the lower end—Mr. Drake will holler to Koloi—and you can speak or not, just as you like. Unless you'd rather I stayed?"

He paused and looked for Dan's orders, but Wheeler never opened his eyes—simply waved a hand to go on.

"I'll fix you so you can't roll off," Adam said, placing the bamboos from the shelf across to the other wall a bit higher up, like the bars of a feed-rack. "There—go to sleep if you want. By thunder! I have heard a lot about Sled Wheeler—but if anybody wants to know now, I can tell 'em it's *so*—no matter what it is! All right now? Then so long!"

"Thanks! Sure—I'm all right—only sleepy. So long!"

Adam was gone, and the distant echoing rush of the water below came up in waves of sound—now hushed, now whispering—as the wind breathed through the cañon. Luxuriously relaxed and comfortable on the hard rock—weak from reaction—Wheeler's thoughts became mixed—then hazy—then he went incontinently to sleep.

A LOUD booming crack—and with its echo the sound of rattling rocks against the cañon walls!

Dan bounced awake on his rocky seat and caught at his rods for support. Below him and coming from the angle of the wall he could see a streak of falling dirt and rocks, just vanishing in the smother of foam at the cañon-bottom.

"That ought to wake the Indian up!"

It was a voice from round the corner, loudly reflected from the opposite rocky recess—Garth's voice strangely magnified. Then Drake's quiet tones answered:

"That was a fool trick! You started a small landslide up there—and it came within a yard of sweeping us off the shelf. Put up that gun. I'll call the Indian when I want him—he's awake all right."

"I'm no fool! I intended to start the loose rock on the edge of the bridge—just to see where to shoot, in case I might want to sweep *you* off."

Garth sounded dangerous, and Dan could see how his smile looked as he rasped softly:

"I have got you here to talk business. This is another show-down, and this time you don't get away—alive, Mr. Duke Drake!"

A pause.

"I want those two leather rolls, Brother Drake—and this time I have got you! Call out your Indian, if you are so sure he is there."

Dan was alert by now. He knew both men, and he knew by their voices this was a duel to the death between the two experienced gamblers. He must see as well as hear. With hardly a thought of the depths below, he started placing the bamboos on his trip to the wall-angle, meanwhile listening for Drake's next move in the game. Drake did not raise his voice as he said:

"No hurry. Koloi will stay put. But tell me how you have got me—I don't see it."

Garth's response came with a more throaty snarl:

"Simply and solely because you will do what I tell you or go down the cañon! When the others come they will find that loose rock from up there has swept you off the shelf—a sad accident!"

Wheeler was hoping he'd get there in time—Garth had the drop on the other man, Dan's good friend, and he would not hesitate to do what he threatened. The man was morbid—a homicidal degenerate at such times——

"They'll never find your body down there!" Garth was purring on. "It will be underground, with a hole in it that they'll never see. Do you see *now?*"

Dan had got where he could peep round the corner, and Garth was smiling—carelessly waving his deadly gun, the most unerring gun on the coast, as he looked down at Drake. Drake sat easily on the end of the far shelf, some distance beyond the narrow shelf or bracket that was beneath the cave-mouth. This last small shelf was just round the corner almost within Dan's reach, but there was no sign of the Indian. Dan was invisible in the dark shadow of the bridge, while the others were out in the noonday sun.

"I don't doubt you would shoot me," Drake was saying, as he settled himself more comfortably on the shelf, "but it would be a losing move. You would not get the jewels—the Twins you seem crazy about."

"Wouldn't I? What would stop me?" Garth laughed—a short bark.

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"My friends—and the fact that you can't get at them," said Drake coolly. "Listen hard! I will tell you something. I got off the train and came to Dalton's with those two jewel-rolls because I knew you could seize them if I took them to San Francisco. There you can do anything and make it stick. Here—you can't!"

"And you notice I am here—and got the drop on you!" Garth still grinned, but not so confidently.

"It will do you no good," Drake said wearily, as if sick of talk. "I sent 'em here by Koloi. He is in the cave with them—provisioned for two days—and he will stay there until I call or send him a token to deliver the rolls to the bearer. You can't get at him, even if you shoot me. Check!"

Garth's smile faded; he considered.

"Not at all a bad move," he said slowly. "Of course I might finish you up—and I notice I usually win by shooting the other man—then I could take my time getting at the Indian in the cave. It can be done by ropes or sinking a shaft, if necessary."

Dan noticed Garth was wavering.

"Wake up, Garth!" Drake called good-naturedly. "Where's your sense? Don't you know that the cave is on my land—as well as the bridge above us there? Kinney and Dalton know the lines and they are my friends. You are not going to pull any rough stuff to get onto my property. I told you that in 'Frisco I should be on your ground and in your power—but here you are in my bailiwick! Do you begin to get it? In fact, I am not sure the 'accident' story would stick if I should turn up missing. Did you ever attend a lynching?"

Garth was far from slow mentally, and he grasped the whole situation in a moment.

"Can't you take a joke? I told you I was no fool," he said impatiently. "I know they're all against me here, and you played a stiff game—I admit that. I shall have to pay. How much do you want for the two rolls?"

Instead of showing any satisfaction at this proposal, Drake looked suspicious. He watched Garth more keenly as he said:

"I will not sell them both—that is final. I will sell *one* for a quitclaim deed to all your mining properties adjoining mine and Brendon's—just as I told you last night. Have you got the papers, all ready for your signature?"

"Yes—call out your Indian. Wait!" Garth seemed struck by a thought. "Have you got both the rolls—has *he* got them both in there, with——"

"He has them both," Drake interrupted. "But you get only one roll, understand that—the one the Indian brings first. But if you are not satisfied that the stone is one of the genuine Twins, I will return your deed. *However*—I want the paper signed and in my hands *first!*"

"You take your chance that the papers may be worthless, witnessed in advance," Garth said calmly as he drew the documents out and signed them in duplicate on his knee with a pencil.

As he handed one to Drake and pocketed the other, he said again—

"Call out your Indian, and tell him to bring both rolls—yours and mine."

He spoke in a tone of defeated resignation, but at the same time furtively drew his gun as Drake turned his face toward the cave to call gently—

"Koloi!"

There was an answering grunt from the cave, and Drake said some more guttural words.

Dan had already opened his mouth to shout a warning to Drake—to tell him Garth had drawn his gun—that he would kill either the Indian or Drake—or both together—the moment that both the rolls were within his reach. But just then out came the Indian's head and hands—he was on all fours—and he had only *one* roll in his hand.

Dan shut his mouth and dodged behind the rock. Drake knew his business and there was no hurry. But had they seen him—Wheeler? Slowly it came to him that in the shadow of the rocky bridge they had not seen his head—so he peeped out more carefully, keeping behind Koloi's legs. He could almost touch the Indian.

Koloi stood on his rock pedestal, two peeled poles in one hand, the leather roll in the other—a splendid statue of the red man in his natural surroundings.

"Tell him to get the other," Garth grumbled. But Drake shook his head.

At another short command the Indian slowly raised one of the poles. Taking the leather roll in his teeth, a pole in each hand, he placed the first rod high above his head and jammed it tight.

At the steady grace of the movement Dan felt his spine crinkle with a thrill of

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admiration. Koloi was going to make the passage on two poles only!

With hand close to the end of the peeled rod already placed, Koloi at once swung out over the depths. As he hung suspended by one hand—his right—clear and free of the wall, he slowly twisted his sinewy wrist, and his body rotated through a half-turn.

He had swung out first with back to the wall; as he turned gradually in the air, left hand hanging by his side and holding the other rod near its end, he swung round to face the wall; then up swept his left hand to put the next support in place. He jerked it into place with one quick pull, swung his weight upon it, kicked the first rod loose with an upward thrust—with the heel of his hand, then slowly rotated in the opposite direction. Up came the right—placed its rod—swung from it—a slow half-turn—then the left—half-turn—then the right.

It was a tense and hair-raising sight—a feat of steady skill and cool strength of muscle and of mind. Koloi was half across the space before one watcher drew a second breath.

Drake stood crouched on the shelf-end, with Garth close behind him.

When the Indian was within reach he turned his head for Drake to take the leather roll from his teeth.

Garth instantly snatched it, over Drake's shoulder.

"It's mine!" he rasped hoarsely. With wild haste he tore the roll open—opened the inner box and held the stone to the light. One darting flash of green fire and he rewrapped and plunged it in his pocket—all with the speed of a conjurer. At the same instant he had out his gun and held it on the Indian.

"Send him for the other—quick!" he snarled. "You'll fool me, will you—you ——? The other roll or he's a dead Indian!"

"Man—let him rest!"

Drake had reached a hand to help Koloi onto the shelf, and looked over his shoulder at Garth, whose face was now the face of a demon.

"Send him for it before I count three—or a dead Indian!" he again shouted in a strange hollow voice. "One—two—three——"

He had stepped back out of reach as he spoke. Drake took one more look into his distorted face and leaped backward, grasping at the gun—the gun of Ghost Garth that never missed—and Garth drew it back as he fired. The movement disturbed his aim—raised it so that the bullet missed Koloi's brain, but pierced the wrist above his head—the wrist that held his weight.

At that instant the Indian placed his other rod—whether by chance or in an attempt to go back—and swung for an instant from the unhurt hand.

An instant only, for Garth leaped back and with a hiss through his closed teeth—a sound of brutal pleasure and relish—he shot the other wrist, clean through the center so that the shattered bone suddenly flowered out round the bullet-hole.

Koloi dropped. One silent faithful look he turned toward Drake, as if to show he knew the Silent Chief had done his best, and sank from sight.

Dan alone watched the falling man—fast and faster he dropped like a plummet—vanished in the smother of foam that took him with kindly silence; a man who had done his best and done well.

SO FATALLY quick and sure had been Garth's movements that Drake had not got to his feet when Koloi disappeared. Drake's own gun-hand had not been free when he made his futile grasp with his left, but now his gun was out and on Garth—his gray eyes gleaming with a steely light.

"It would give me great pleasure to shoot you now, Garth." He spoke in a level, deadly monotone. "But I have other plans at present."

Dan did not hear this speech, because Drake spoke so quietly, and because there was a rushing sound in his own ears, caused by the sudden turmoil of killing-rage within him. He was whispering to himself—

"Just wait—just wait!"

But he made no loud sound.

"You always were a vicious demon, Garth," Drake went on, "and now it is getting the best of you—some day soon one of those spells will spell your finish, and may I be there to see!"

As Drake slowly put up his gun, Garth spoke—in a tired voice that had a quaver in it.

"Talk—talk and preach! I have got one and I'll get the other. Be careful how you rouse me or one of my spells will be

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your finish. You'd follow the Indian now if I were sure of the other stone—I may need you yet to get it for me." He lowered at Drake sullenly.

Of a sudden he roused himself.

"But I've got a man with the nerve to get it now. Wheeler must be on the other side there by this time. Oh, Wheeler! Dan Wheeler!"

Dan stuck his whole head round the corner.

"Yes. What's the shouting about?" He made his tone as quiet as usual.

"The other stone is in the cave. Have you got young Kinney's sticks?"

"What sticks?" Dan was thinking. "So he knew about those——"

"The bamboos you started with—the poles he got between his legs. We heard you in the dark."

"Yes. I'm sitting on two of 'em—can't you see the other ends?"

"I can now," shading his eyes and peering into the dark. "Can you use them? Can you get to the cave?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dan cheerfully. "Why?"

"There's just ten thousand in it for you if you get the other roll in there and bring it to *me*."

"Bought it from Drake, have you?" Dan asked anxiously.

"That's none of your business."

"Then I let it alone—never interfere in the business of other folks and you'll never——"

"Shut up! Stop playing fool and get it."

"Don't get so hot about it—maybe I will."

"Well then—get at it," Garth snapped.

"And again maybe I won't."

Garth began to get white and vicious again, and Wheeler went on:

"Now—now! Hold on to yourself a minute and watch Danny!"

He knew his power to lash Garth to a frenzy, and he did not want to do it at that moment. He wanted to see the inside of the Gold Cave. He was in the condition in which he won desperate fights against odds—a state in which he did not feel himself physically; felt neither pain nor muscular fatigue—felt only a faith in himself that knew no bounds.

He swung two of the rods around the angle and put them in place without thinking of the mechanical details. Then he swung his legs over them with a parallel-bar swing that was easy for him. He heard Drake draw in a hissing breath of sympathetic terror, and only smiled. Garth called out jubilantly:

"Good lad, Dan! You see, Drake, I win because I have the brains to pick my men. He can beat the Indian at his own game. O-ho!"

Dan said nothing, but continued his parallel-bar exercise. Soon he stood on the little shelf. Leaving his sticks in place—all four where they were last used—he entered the cave.

He found it dry inside, and very dark. He lit a match and looked about the irregular little room. It was roughly oval at the entrance, but narrowed to a vertical crevice within ten feet. The walls were jagged with sharp angles—not water-worn but broken—and the floor was a small space of wind-driven sand.

On the sand lay the other leather roll. He picked it up and at once felt that it was empty—nothing hard in it. Drake had not sent the other stone by the Indian!

Wheeler did not know what this might mean, but if any bargaining was to be done that roll must feel fatter and look fatter. He could find no piece of rock but one, as large as his head, but with this he broke a piece from a projecting spur of the wall—a piece that would do. This he wrapped in the leather roll, put the roll in his pocket, and stepped out on the shelf with caution and deliberation.

He was thinking how Koloi had stood on that shelf a few minutes ago, and where Koloi was at the moment, somewhere underground where the torrent roared forever. He frowned as he felt the hardening within him of that hatred for the murderer. Then he looked across at Garth, standing just beyond Drake on the shelf. Between them was the gulf that only he could cross.

"I have the roll, Garth." He showed it and put it back in his pocket. "In my pocket, and there it stays until I get my pay. I am not working for you any longer. I have quit. And I don't trust you out of sight or reach. How about the ten thousand?"

Dan had no notion that the Boss had any such amount of cash on his person. He made his demand just by way of starting something—to get his man in motion, as he would make a feint in fighting, instinctively.

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For he knew well that he needed every advantage in this engagement. He knew Garth was dangerous—deadly in his present mood.

He realized that Garth had the advantage of him, in that Garth was willing—even glad—to shoot to kill at any moment when it would be to his interest to do so. The bodies would never be found to bear witness against him. Dan made sure his shirt was open so that he could get to his gun handily.

Garth started as if stung.

"You quitter! You are a cheap yellow pup—and you won't take the word of Ghost Garth—you —— ——"

"Stop! It gets you nothing. Look here!"

Dan drew and held Garth's eyes with his own level-eyed stare.

"I do not trust you and you know why. I don't risk my neck on the poles or take a step in your direction until you hand over the other roll and *your gun*, to Drake. He will hold them for security until we are all safe out of the cañon—where there are witnesses."

Garth flashed his smile on the instant.

"I got you—just so I carry the other roll. You will hand it to me as soon as you are within reach. Get your sticks and come on."

Dan made a move toward his rods, still in place on the far side of the shelf, but stopped to say over his shoulder casually:

"I told you you'd have to buy the stone first—the one in my pocket. Did you fix it while I was inside? Did he buy it, Drake?"

"No."

Drake shook his head, but never looked over his shoulder at Garth.

Garth showed his teeth viciously and leveled his gun.

"I hold the cards now!" he said softly. "Don't move toward your guns—either of you— Sit down, Drake—lower!"

Drake sat down on the path again. Garth aimed over his head at Dan.

"Now, Wheeler, get those poles and start this way before I count *ten* or you follow the Indian!" Again his voice was flat and hollow.

"You're crazy on this counting business!" Dan caught him up sharply.

"Look here!"

He faced about—caught and held Garth's darting eyes.

He knew he could weaken Garth if he could get his eyes—now he had him.

"Garth—you're a fool!" he rapped out. "You can't shoot me—and lose the roll I carry. That is what you are after—get hold of yourself. What's the matter with you? No, Drake—don't shoot him!"

Garth's eyes followed Wheeler's—to Drake—and his gun wavered.

"*Now*, Garth! Drop that gun!"

Wheeler had covered him in the instant of wavering, and as he barked the sudden command the gun dropped from Garth's hand—much to the surprize of that gentleman.

Drake, sitting at his feet, pounced upon it—at the same time said:

"Good work, Dan! You still work the old tricks—and they are good!"

Wheeler himself felt a thrill of triumph as he realized that he could dominate this dangerous man. He had got Garth's goat.

Dan looked at the dumfounded Boss, standing with mouth open.

"Thank you Garth," he said kindly. Good-by!"

Drake had turned to look up into Garth's blank face with quiet enjoyment. At the words of Dan's farewell he faced about toward the little shelf under the cave where Dan had stood.

It was empty. Dan had vanished.

In another moment his eyes got used to the darkness under the bridge and he saw the reason. Wheeler was already on the poles—half-way to the angle of the wall, on the far side of the shelf.

The four poles already placed for him, Dan had only to shift them once—twice—three times—swing them round the angle, and with the next shift, he was round the corner and gone—his body concealed by the angle of the wall.

Staring incredulously, Drake crouched on his end of the path—Garth standing behind him and gazing over his head. Dan's hypnotic glare had weakened Garth for a time—wrought up and sensitively intent—and he was still stunned. But as Dan swung round the corner the Boss brushed his arm across his eyes.

At the same moment he took a staggering step that would have knocked Drake from the path if Drake had not put back a hand to steady him.

Roused by the contact, Garth sprang into action, and a vicious snarl flashed across his face.

"—— ——," he cursed stupidly. "I'll get

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him yet! —— —— him to —— the——"

His oaths were blotted out in the roaring crash of a gun. He had snatched Drake's gun from its holster and fired at the far ends of the sticks on which Dan sat—still visible against the opposite wall.

With a shout of horror Drake reached for the gun—tried to knock it up with the barrel of Garth's gun which he still held—but Garth drew back and kept firing—teeth bared and cursing.

At the fourth shot a scale of rock chipped loose, dislodging one of the rods, and the fifth shot splintered the other bamboo close to the end.

The two rods on which Dan had been resting fell with the pieces of rock—vanished in the dark shadow of the bridge; and the echoes of the shots died away. The silence brought back the distant rush of water far beneath—carrying the rods, and another victim, down the hungry maw of the cañon.

"There!" Garth panted like a spent runner. "That fixes *him!* I told him—he—couldn't double-cross me, —— —— him!"

Drake was numb with horror and rage—stupidly revolving the possibilities. Could Dan have got off those two rods that fell?

No—he had only just swung across them, just displaced the others.

Drake sank on the path—stared at the place where Dan had last been visible—covered his working face with his hands. Garth's gun, escaping from his weakened fingers, clattered on the rocks and vanished over the edge.

"Well, the show's over—ring down the curtain!" Garth said at length.

His voice was not quite steady, but he flashed his smile.

"How'd you like the big scene? ——'f I don't believe you been weeping. Ho! David weeping for Absalom!"

"If it would do any good I'd offer you up a sacrifice," Drake said evenly. "Maybe you don't know it, but I could kill you with my hands, and the one shot in that gun wouldn't stop me. Has it soaked into your warped and dirty soul that you have lost your other diamond? . . . I knew that would get you!"

For a look of cunning had wiped the smile from Garth's face as Drake spoke. He was not insane—no more so than many a man who has once got the lust of killing firmly rooted in the foul soil of an unclean soul, where it grows rank and deadly. But he had lost sight of his supreme purpose for the moment, and now the other gem was lost to him—gone down with the underground torrent that had taken Wheeler's body.

"You have no remorse for killing two real men," Drake said with a quiet contempt. "But your turn is coming, and you have lost out on the big game—you poor crazy fool."

He took his own gun away from Garth as he said—

"Get on out of here!"

But it was not all chagrin in Garth's face. His reading of men and motives was truly wonderful—a faculty that was heightened in the moments of physical reaction following his fits of deadly anger. He made no move to leave, but crouched to peer up under Drake's hatbrim.

"S-s-s!" he hissed, and his smile widened. "Fool! Yes-s-s — fool! I don't think! What's the card up your sleeve *now,* Duke Drake? Do you hope Wheeler is alive, or didn't he have the gem with him?"

"Get out of here!" He controlled his firm features well, did Drake.

"Listen—are you one of the Secret Order That Is Not? Ho! The Nameless Order can bring Wheeler to life! Or fish up the other one of the Twins from the vasty deep!" Garth shouted in boisterous reaction. "Drake—Duke Drake is a Priest of the Nameless Shrine!"

Of a sudden the silence smote the dark cañon like a thunderclap—it seemed as if the echoing rush of the water was stilled, carried off on the cool breath of horror that swept up the cañon.

Slowly Garth was turning away to start down the path, when a call sounded from above them at the wall-top near the bridge.

"Hello down there!" It was Dalton's voice. "Where are Wheeler and the Indian? What has happened?"

He was shading his eyes and peering at the two in the gorge; Luke Wood and Adam Kinney came beside him.

"What's wrong?" shouted Dalton again. "What has happened?"

"Only an accident!" Drake answered steadily. "Tell you later. Go on, Garth!"

But Garth was stooping to peer into Drake's face with a fierce grin.

"What is it *now?*" he whispered tensely. "You've got another card up your sleeve! I believe you are a Nameless Order man—and you think it can bring Wheeler to life. Ho-ho! I can read you like a book, and

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you've got an ace in the hole. Is it the Secret Order That Is Not——"

A poke from Drake's gun silenced him—he turned to go down the path.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEELER had swung out of sight round the corner when he heard the reports of Garth's gun. He saw the rock chipped around the far end of his rods, and he was still sitting on the two bamboos that Garth shot free. He had a free rod in each hand, one of which was almost placed, when his support gave way.

A pang of pure terror shot through him like an electric shock—tore at his bowels and shocked his muscles stiff as he felt himself drop into the gorge. A tearing jerk wrenched at his shoulder—the joint strained and cracked—then he swung against the wall, which scraped his left hand as it hung at his side.

He was hanging by one hand from the pole he was just about to put in place—his weight and fall had jammed it tight, and his muscles, stiffened with the fright, held his grip tight and fast. He was saved for the moment.

His first impulse was to get both hands on that life-saving rod. He had almost let fall the other bamboo from his hanging left hand. Again he felt the stinging thrill of terror shoot through him as his fingers tightened on the swinging rod. It was already slipping from his grasp, and he had almost lost his chance of saving himself.

Without that other rod he might hang from his fixed support for a time—but it would take a long time for help to reach him—an hour—more perhaps! The cold sweat broke out at the thought of hanging over the abyss for an endless time—shouting—waiting—but he must not think of that now.

He must try to do as Koloi had done—swing and turn—keeping each rod in the same hand like an elongated finger and shifting his grip as he placed each rod in turn.

He hung lax for a few seconds to rest his trembling muscles and get them under control, recalling how the Indian had held and swung the poles; then went to work with deliberate caution. He kept his eyes and mind fixed on the rods and the walls above him.

Carefully he raised and placed the second rod, felt it jam firmly, tested it well, then freed the first rod by an upward jolt with the heel of his hand. It worked!

And it was this first transfer, by the way, that accounted for the change in Drake's despairing grief—the change Garth had uncannily detected in his face.

Drake had caught a glimpse, in the dark shadow beyond the angle, that had made him peep between his fingers. He alone had got a faint impression of a third bamboo pole beyond the two that Garth had shot away, but it had not struck into his consciousness what this might mean.

With his face in his hands, it came to him that Dan must have had a hand on this third rod—might swing from it—and he peered between his fingers.

The rod was still there! With held breath he watched the dimly seen end—invisible to Garth—and did not breathe or move a muscle until he saw the end of the bamboo come free from the wall. It did not fall, but came *up* and then away—out of sight. Dan was still alive and had another rod!

Drake waited to compose his features to a decent grief before he exposed his face to Garth's fiendish scrutiny. And even then Garth saw something, although he did not at the time draw the correct inference. He believed Wheeler had gone down the cañon, and would never be seen again.

But to come back to Dan.

After the first two transfers Wheeler was surprized to find that Koloi's method was easier than his own—provided he did not try to get any higher, or even to keep at the same level. He could pass along the cañon for any distance with almost no fatigue, if he went down-hill.

But this was going to bring him out below the shelf. He had started at a little lower level and was going lower with each transfer. And at the shelf-end there was no foothold—nothing to get a handhold on, to pull himself up on the shelf.

And it was there, against the very end of the path, that he fought it out, gaining an inch or two at a time. It was necessary, in order to get any higher, to draw himself up—"chin himself" with one hand—and to hold that position while the next rod was placed a bit higher than the one from which he hung. And it had to be done with each hand alternately—first the right—then the left—and repeat.

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Athlete as he was, and in the pink of condition, it was killing work. Three times he had to place both poles abreast and hang from them—relaxed—to rest his aching muscles. But he stuck to it with the grim grit of which he was constructed chiefly, and at last he got one pole placed a foot above the level of the path—far out over the shelf itself—so that he could drag himself onto the flat surface of its top, on his stomach. There, on his face, he lay and allowed his muscles to relax—that very instant they were paralyzed and powerless from fatigue.

In an aching luxury of relief and gratitude, he lay and listened to the talk between Drake and Garth. All during his passage and struggle to get on the path he had been hearing their voices clearly, and now the meaning of their words came back to him.

So Drake and Garth thought he was dead. He was touched at the grief shown by Drake —it is rare that a man has the chance to see the mourning for his own decease—and he wished he might give Drake some sign. Strange they had seen the ends of only two of his bamboos—then the words of Garth—

"Are you hoping Wheeler has not gone—" etc. So Drake perhaps had seen the other rods. That was better.

Then came the hooting shout about the Secret Order! And again Dan felt his hair crawl and his back crinkle at the silence that followed. Was Garth insane? Most of the Boss' exploits had been ascribed to a sort of mania—and yet he had brains and the power to see into folks and things.

Dan suddenly sat up. Here was a chance to put one over on the Boss! Talk about stage-effect—and impossible situations—here was a plot made to order. If only he knew how to make the best use of it! He was sure of one thing—Lu Yan knew what this contest for those two jewels was about —what it meant. He was the man to go to—the man to help him plan. He must get to the city—unseen if possible—but he wished he might get word to Drake and Brendon.

Like an answer to prayer came a step on the path—far up the cañon he saw Brendon carefully picking his way toward him. Dan got up and held up a hand in a signal for silence as he went to meet his lordship.

As he went he heard the hail of Dalton from the walls above.

"Sh-h!"

He led Brendon a bit farther up the path.

"Speak low—you can hear them around the corner."

And only when they were well on their way to the upper end of the cañon did he stop at a wide spot of the shelf.

"We can sit down here—I am tired," said he. "Now get ready for a jolt. In the first place, Koloi is dead. Garth murdered him, and me too! He shot out the rods, and I fell down the cañon."

"By Jove!" Brendon's eyes widened. "Strange you should say that, you know, even in a joke. When Adam came back I sent him up the mine trail alone. I didn't know what might happen to you in here, don't you know. I got to thinking—if you tried that pole-trick, just to show yourself something, as you did Jonah—and all that—and if you dropped your sticks and couldn't get back.

"I got really alarmed, don't you know, fancying you hanging on one stick with nobody to help you! And when I heard the shots echo up the cañon—I just couldn't stand it any longer—really! I had to come just as fahst as I could make it, you know."

"Well—by-y Hen-ry!" Dan opened his green eyes wide as he slowly brought out his strongest oath. "You must have felt it in the air—clairvoyance or something!" He looked into the Englishman's frank and attractive face, troubled in sympathy, and he felt a constriction of his throat. "You worried about me enough to— Well—by golly!"

"And why wouldn't I?" asked Brendon in surprize. "I knew how it felt, you know—used to have nightmares like that myself—and I could see you hanging helpless, with somebody shooting at you—all that sort of thing."

So this young aristocrat had really worried about him. Dan was not used to being coddled. In fact he had been knocked about more than he cared to talk about. This was something unusual.

"Blood will tell—no use talking!" he commented. "Ever save anybody's life?" he asked suddenly.

"No—or—only swimming—that sort of thing. Not to count that silly V. C. performance, you know."

"You came darn near it today—you would have if I'd dropped that pole—and I won't forget it—bet on that! And just to keep your courage up until we can do something more—it looks like you and Drake

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would win big money on your mine deal. Drake has got all Garth's claims—and your mine is clear and clean."

"No—really? I say, you know!" Brendon scrambled up, sat down again, flushed and turned pale. "Excuse me, but it's too good to be true. How do you know?"

"I saw and heard the whole thing—it was like this."

Dan gave a clear and concise story of the happenings at the cave—only omitting any mention of the Order, as well as one or two other topics that might need too long explanations or lead to violent proceedings. For instance, he let the Indian's death go as part accident, and he cautioned Brendon not to show too much feeling toward Garth.

"You see, we don't know, yet, what is behind this race and contest for the Twins. It is plain there's something in it beside money—but Garth is a smooth party and we've got to go a-tiptoe. Drake will put you wise, and I have got to get to Frisco and see Lu Yan before the rest of you get there. There is some mystery about the other diamond—these Twins—and Lu Yan will know if anybody. Our game—yours and mine—is to back any play that Drake and Lu Yan make. We can't lose—and you are sure to win!"

"Where do you—er—profit by it, though? You have lost your job and made an enemy of Garth again." Brendon looked anxious.

"I always land on my feet—and look at the fun I'm having!" said Dan. "Now I expect I've got to count ties—or ride the brake-rods—all the way to Frisco. The worst of it will be getting to the railroad."

"I wish I could go with you, by Jove! It would be simply ripping—but I know it is impossible."

"Sorry, but I guess it is," said Dan. "You have got to take word to Drake from me—and you'd better take this roll. Leave the rock in it just as it is. He may want to use it in some way. But for your life don't let Garth see or suspect it. He would murder you or anybody else to get it—he thinks the other jewel is in it. Put it inside your coat. Now you'd better go and meet the gang. I am going to stay here until you are well out of the way—all of you."

"Wait! One moment!" Brendon was seized with a project. "After dark, if you come along past Kinney's I will try to fix it so that Jonah will get loose. I will put some food and a blanket on him and wait for you down the trail—where the bullet hit the rock—so you can ride him to the railroad. What?"

"Fine. Perhaps you'd better let young Adam in on it," said Dan. "It will help a lot. Good-by—remember to look sad!"

"Righto! Good night—until dark!"

Dan was left in the cañon to meditate, until he had given both parties time to get well beyond sight of the cañon-mouth. The sun already had passed out of sight, and only struck across the gorge near the top. He shivered and drew back into his narrow cranny in the wall; but he was filled with satisfaction and delighted anticipation.

He had lost a congenial job—running the Cascade Club—and a good salary, and he did not know what he would get out of his present venture, in cash. But with him loyalty to his friends was more than a guiding principle—more than a ruling motive; it was the very fiber of his being. He never weighed or considered it—for nothing counted against it.

He could no more help doing his utmost for Lu Yan, Drake and Brendon than he could help pursuing Garth with a deep-lying, overwhelming hatred that came as natural as breathing. There was no rush or hurry about it—he was not bothered by conflicing desires—he simply went the way of Dan Wheeler because he was built that way—couldn't help it—and didn't want to.

He kept his tryst with Brendon and Adam Kinney, in the trail below their shack, after it was safely dark. Adam had brought along everything needed for a night in the open, and told him how to reach the railroad in the morning, at a point near the top of a stiff grade where he could easily jump a west-bound train.

Dan found all his instructions good and wise, and boarded a freight about noon the next day—transferred at the first station to a blind-baggage platform, and made the trip in comparative comfort. One brakeman was the only person who got a glimpse of him, and two dollars closed his mouth effectually, inasmuch as he did not know Wheeler by sight.

CHAPTER IX

LU YAN sat in the fragrant luxury of his Oriental apartments, reading his favorite poet in a long endwise book that folded like an accordion. He looked up

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from his reading now and then, to gaze thoughtfully at a fat, cherub-cheeked Buddha who sat upon a pedestal with placid eyes turned inward in eternal Nirvanic contemplation. At such times it seemed that the rich merchant failed to absorb the contentment and repose of the mighty Tathagata, for he invariably returned to his reading after a long and anxious sigh.

To him his new doorman came to report—

"A stranger is below in haste—gives the honorable name Dan."

"Bring him up at once." Lu Yan rose and spoke in Chinese. "Could you not see that he was a friend and a man of merit?"

"Pardon a stupid servant, honorable master, but the man was soiled from travel on devil-wagons and his quality thus concealed."

"Hasten then, snail-foot!"

Wheeler was smutted and grimed, without a hat, and his flannel shirt was torn up both sleeves. But the light from his keen greenish eyes shot out the brighter from contrast with his blackened face. Under his arm he carried a large bundle.

"Excuse my looks, but I am traveling incog, as the books used to say, and I wasn't anxious to make an impression." Dan began hurried and without ceremony. "Please tell your new man to keep his mouth shut, or it will be all over Chinatown in half a minute."

He did not need to make the last request. Lu Yan had got the situation before three words had been spoken, and had summoned the servant with a soft hand-clap. The man had appeared, got his instructions and disappeared almost as soon as Dan was done speaking.

"You are all the more welcome that you come in need," Lu Yan said gently. "You will require fresh clothing, and I will send——"

"Not a bit! I thought of that, and I burgled my rooms at the hotel as I came by—got 'em in this bundle. I did a smooth job, if I must tell it—not a soul has recognized me since I was killed in Bridge Cañon. I will tell you all about it as soon as I get clean and filled up. I have not eaten since yesterday A. M., and it seems more like a week."

Lu Yan's eyes were bright with prideful affection, but he spoke merely as a Chinese gentleman:

"Not until you have bathed and been refreshed by food and drink can I permit myself the pleasure of listening to your story. Let me show you the room I have prepared for your coming."

Dan had to bottle up all the news he was holding. He wanted to begin talking as he ate, but he knew that Lu Yan would suffer if he did. So he changed and ate well before telling his adventures.

Lu Yan listened with the complete absorption of a child hearing a fairy-tale—never once interrupting—and he did not miss a detail or a shade of color, up to the point where Dan told of the talk between Drake and Garth after Dan's supposed fall into the cañon. Then, as he told of Garth's mention of the Nameless Order, Lu Yan raised an impressive hand.

"Let me stop you here to ask—you believe me to be your good friend at all times, absent or present?"

"I know it mighty well!"

"Then take a friend's advice. Speak no word—ask no questions—repeat no tales upon that topic. When you think of it, dismiss it from your mind. This may be disappointing—even annoying—but I will tell you that twice in my life I have known a man to do as Garth has done. In the face of solemn warning he persisted in flouting the power that acts without a name. Both these men went to their fathers, very soon. I will venture the guess that Mr. Drake did not answer Garth's insolent question."

"He did not. He spoke of something else."

"A wise example to follow. I have finished my interruption. What followed?"

"In the cañon, you mean?" said Dan. "They went out and then I met Brendon."

After he had briefly sketched his return trip Wheeler could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"What I can't understand is why Garth is so wild to get the two gems at any price. Why did Drake go to all that trouble to keep Garth from getting them? And, for cat's sake, why did Drake let him have one and hide the other? What is there about this mystery of the Twins anyhow?"

Lu Yan made impressive preparations for his story. He rose and said:

"You will pardon me if I first send my servants out of the house for the night. I shall give myself the pleasure of supplying your wants myself this evening."

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When he returned to the room Lu Yan placed the dish of varied sweetmeats within Dan's reach before he seated himself cross-legged on the couch facing him. Then he began with an obvious pleasure in the recital.

"It hās come to pass that your adventures and trials have fitted you to understand the meaning and importance of the things that are to be put before you.

"The Twins are two and two alone, for they have no equals. They are two rare and rarely beautiful green diamonds with a rare and wonderful history.

"Many hundreds of years ago these two diamonds—the Twins—cut and set with a skill and cunning long forgotten, blazed and flared in a most secret place in a certain temple of inland Asia. It was known that these Twins of the Temple had awful and mysterious power. So fashioned and so placed were they that their potent rays met and strengthened one the other, so that they shot from within themselves a green fire that seared the eye and shriveled the life of men. Only the priests of that temple might look upon them and live, and even they only on occasion of certain rare and secret rites of their religion.

"The temple became famous—its priests of great renown—and the people of that land multiplied. They waxed prosperous and powerful until, on a dark and fateful day, the gems were stolen away by a false priest of the temple. That same day the gods turned away their faces from that land. From that day misfortunes and disgrace have befallen the mourning multitudes dwelling within the confines of that country.

"For many, many years holy and noble men—leaders of that unhappy people—have given up their lives to the search for the missing Twins of the temple, in order that they might restore the ancient wealth and glory of that land. Far and wide they sought and traveled—at times they found traces of the lost Twins—and round about those two green gems have grown up a host of strange tales and beliefs.

"Like many another famous jewel, the Twins have left behind them a broad trail of bloody deeds and sinful plots—have given rise to many superstitions, some of them of little worth. But of them it is often told that they bring sure death to him who dares possess them both at once, unless he be a priest of the temple and without grievous sin.

"Also it is always told that whoever has in his possession even one of the Twins, unless his eyes be blue or green, he shall come to misfortune or death right soon. But if the lucky man have eyes of green by nature, and come by the stone without guilt, his is a charmed life so long as he carries the stone; and good fortune shall be his thereafter.

"Moreover and meanwhile, despite all their misfortunes and lessened influence, the priests of that temple have retained their power of prophecy. It is believed that they foretell truly what is to come to pass, and it is said that to this day no prophecy of theirs has gone unfulfilled.

"Of late, as had never before happened, the priests have foretold the return of the Twins to their abode in the temple—and that right soon. With their return shall come to the people of the land all their ancient wealth and power, and with the gems shall come a wise and powerful ruler to lead his people to happiness and glory. These things they have told and these things the people believe.

"Still more recently the gems have been traced through Europe—to America—to New York and Chicago. And this brings their story up to today. When one of the gems came into the possession of Duke Drake, he notified me of the fact and promised to sell it to me for a certain price. Some time later he chanced to find the other, and he has agreed to do all that lies within his power to deliver that one also—for a much greater price, but a price not out of proportion to the difficulty and danger attending upon its delivery. And Duke Drake is an honest man."

Lu Yan paused in his narration, and Dan promptly asked—

"You are buying for the priests of the temple?"

"I am acting as the agent of Prince Iotu, the heir to the throne of that people and a priest of that temple, who is living in seclusion as his vows require—in my little house across the bay."

"And Garth intends to hold him up for a bigger price, if he gets hold of the stones?" Dan guessed.

"It is not so simple—and this accounts for some strange proceedings—for there is another pretender to the throne of that land. Although it is little known, it is a land rich in resources, and a certain European Power

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wants to get valuable concessions there. They can obtain them from the pretender if they can place him on the throne, and they can place him on the throne if they can restore the Twins to the temple. The candidate who brings home the Twins of the temple will be the next to rule that land."

"Murder!" Dan sat up straighter. "What are they doing about it? Does Drake know all this?"

"Not all—and that explains why he has allowed Garth to get one of the stones, I imagine," said Lu Yan placidly. "Neither does he know that Garth has been in communication with the consul, and with other secret agents of the Government."

"Whee!" Dan whistled softly. "And I am supposed to be carrying one of 'em!"

"It behooves you not to let your existence become known," said Lu Yan. "You should go well armed at all times."

"I am—I have the gun Drake sent." He touched his side where it lay.

"I am under bonds never to go without it, you know. But this is a sweet mix-up! Drake ought to get this business right. Listen! When I was dodging up the back stairs at the hotel, there were flunkeys all over the place talking Dutch or something—does that help?"

"I hear that a strange cruiser has anchored in the bay, and that the officers are to attend a ball tonight—or soon," Lu Yan said thoughtfully. "Also that a British cruiser appeared at the same time. It appears that we are the center of an international diplomatic enterprise of some importance."

"You'd make a dandy!" Dan said admiringly. "You can sit there like your friend on the stump—" with a jerk of his head toward Buddha—"and roll out words that rattle like a snare-drum, and never crack an eyelash!"

He added:

"You don't seem worried about those two diamonds that are the center of an international diplomatic complication—not so you'd notice it."

"I have faith in Duke Drake, and perhaps I am influenced by the superstitions concerning the Twins and their mysterious powers." With a smile.

"M-hm! Give *me* a gun!" Dan said as he drew forth the new Colt that Drake had sent him and examined it affectionately.

As he put it away he got up restlessly.

"What do we *do?* Something has got to be done—Garth is not going to walk off with the ribbon without knowing he's been in a scrap. We can't just sit around and wait until Drake comes—and I wonder——"

As he paced the floor with his smooth leopard-stride, Dan stopped and looked at Lu Yan askance.

"About this gem business—and Garth's crazy spells when he shouts things that will get him into trouble. I don't suppose—You can't tell me any more about— Now, do you guess there is a certain party, not to be mentioned, mixed up in the frame-up—just for instance?"

His grave, preoccupied face was in contrast with the dancing light in his eyes.

Lu Yan was very serious, even threatening, as he answered:

"The matter is of sufficient importance to justify the interference of any influence, however powerful. But I can assure you that you and I shall not know any more concerning this not-to-be-mentioned party, and that asking questions will only add to our troubles and lead to disappointment."

Dan had never heard Lu Yan speak so sharply and with so much emphasis.

"Good stuff!" said he crisply. "That's talk! What do we do?"

"We shall do our duty as soon as it is clear," said Lu Yan, "and my first duty will be a pleasure—to provide you with funds for present needs, since a dead man draws no salary."

"Dan Wheeler is an exception to all rules." Dan flashed his lightning half-smile. "Garth will pay, whether he knows it or not. And now is a good time to do some scouting before Garth and Drake get back. I am going to do it."

"Just what I was about to suggest," Lu Yan assented. "While you make some inquiries at the Cascade Club, in disguise, I will see Senator Sands. We should be able to undermine Garth's position and weaken his influence."

"Disguise — me?" Dan wrinkled his nose. "I hate it." With disgust he added, "Cheap stage-stuff!"

"Yes—but understand that you may consider yourself for the time under orders." Lu Yan spoke with calm assurance.

"Orders—whose orders?" Dan stiffened.

"Orders from a source unknown—but orders that must be obeyed."

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Through his shell-rimmed glasses Lu Yan's eyes looked owlish. He added, "A source not to be mentioned," quite slowly.

"Hm—I see. Shoot!" Dan answered cheerfully.

"It is well—you make progress!" Lu Yan laid a hand lightly on Dan's shoulder. "We shall visit Wen Li the laundryman in the matter of a disguise. For the moment you are a Chinaman."

"Lead me to it!"

Lu Yan provided a long cloak for Dan, with a hood like a monk's cowl, and they set forth.

CHAPTER X

BRENNER was acting manager of the Cascade Club in Wheeler's absence, and he was enjoying the sensation. With an expensive Havana in his teeth he paced the large lounging-room of the club, and made an occasional round of the gaming-room in the rear. As he passed the door of the vacant office across the hall, he took a speculative look in that direction. Finally as a climax of assumption he entered the sanctum of the chief and took his seat before the desk in a swivel-chair.

He looked up at the ornate chandelier, at "Washington Crossing the Delaware" over the mantel in a clotted snow-storm. Again it occurred to him it was strange that the Boss had never found that little door behind the picture. Such an outlet, for use in case of a raid by the police, was commonly found in gambling-houses. But Garth, no doubt, was too secure in his position to fear anything from the law. He had no need for any such way of escape.

Yet the better element in the city was already talking vigilance committee, and Garth was relying chiefly on his support from the underworld—an uncertain support always. Garth was a wonder!

What was the matter with the lights? The chandelier almost went out—the office darkened. Brenner took a step toward the door, and at the moment the lights flared up once more. They had shifted the main to another tank at the gas-works, no doubt.

A rattling thump came from behind G. Washington—in the passage over the mantel. Brenner reached for his gun instinctively.

The small door was lifted from within, raising the picture with it.

A cued Chinaman's head with green goggles came through the opening.

"Don't shoot, Brenner—I'll come down," said a familiar tense voice. "These —— Chinese shoes! Hear me skate down the steps in here? Say! Did you know you can turn off all the lights on this floor with a cock in there? Pretty nifty! In case of a raid—just douse the glim on the way out and let 'em ramble in the dark. Shut that door before somebody wanders in. Is my cue on straight?"

Not until Dan raised his goggles did Brenner close his mouth, which he seemed to have forgotten.

"Wheeler—what the ——?"

"Don't holler! I can hear, if I do wear a pigtail. Your wash is up-stairs at your door and you owe me a dollar."

"I thought I had 'em again." Brenner felt in his pocket mechanically.

"Never mind the dollar—give it to the janitor to buy adhesive plaster. He got fresh with the new Chink washwoman, and I had to slap his wrist. Your cigar is burning a hole in the carpet."

"What's the answer?" Brenner tossed his stump into the grate. "Are you watching the employees? I don't see that they are knocking down more than you'd expect."

"I am not. Never shall I smoke Garth's good cigars again—we do not speak. 'Cause why? I am dead for a spell, and I don't smoke anyway."

"I don't smoke any more cigars than the rest—not as many," Brenner protested.

"Get off that!" snapped Dan. "Wake up! I am not working for Garth any more, and dead men tell no tales. I said I was dead—get it? Dead!"

"Well—all right!" Brenner snapped back. "Want me to sob on my shirt-front? What you hanging round here for, if you ought to be pushing clouds?"

"Grammar's mixed, but you mean well, Brenner. I have come back to earth to tell you to stand from under. Garth is slipping, and he'll come down soon—and hard. If you are good, we have picked you for a star part in the new cabinet."

"Who's we?" Brenner asked.

"Me and—some more of the boys. Garth has been playing both ends—robbing the crooks as well as the ring—and besides, decent people won't stand it. Now button up your lip tight and I'll let you in."

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Dan gave a skeleton outline of the trip to the cañon, with enough of the reasons behind it to account for his temporary disguise. He also told him why Garth was soon to be deposed, and came to the present moment.

"Now Drake, Brendon, Lu Yan, and you are the only ones who know I am still on earth. Just about now Lu Yan is telling Senator Sands. We are going to do what we can to stop Garth, and you are going to help us."

"How do I know I am?" Brenner stiffened. "How do I know I won't be left to hold the bag?—Or if I get left between two chairs on the floor?"

"The Senator will tell you. What are all the foreigners doing around the hotel?" Dan asked abruptly.

"How in —— do I know?" Brenner was getting worried. "They want to see Garth—or the main guy does. Say! I don't like this. How do you know the Boss' foot has slipped? If he makes good, I'd be in a ——"

"I told you Senator Sands would tell you. Here they are now."

A soft knock on the office-door, and Brenner let in the Senator and Lu Yan. The Chinese merchant bowed with grace and dignity, and the Senator's grave face lighted at the sight of Dan in his disguise.

"How does it feel to be reincarnated as a laundryman?" he asked Dan, and smiled at the embarrassment that flushed Dan's face through the yellow stain.

"Beats dancing on nothing in Bridge Cañon," said Dan. "Try it if you don't believe me."

"You actually crossed the gap on two poles?" the Senator asked seriously. "You deserve the whole mine as a reward. I have been there, and it is a frightful thing to do."

"Not a doubt of it in my mind," said Dan. "I wish I could quit doing it every time I try to get to sleep. Once is a-plenty!"

"We owe you a big debt that we must try to pay," the Senator said.

"Have you told Brenner that we must make some changes soon?"

"Yes. He's scared and doubtful."

"Of course anything you say goes, Senator," Brenner hastened to protest. "I have worked for you before and I should be glad to again."

"You will not regret it. Your first work will be to follow any—er—suggestions of Mr. Wheeler's, even if he looks like a laundryman."

"I'll take my orders from Wheeler—glad to," Brenner answered crisply. "What next?"

"That's all—except to keep us informed as to Garth and his dealings with the naval officers. When Mr. Drake arrives we can work with more certainty."

The Senator turned to Dan with deference.

"Can you think of anything more?"

"The keys," said Dan; and to Brenner—"Let's see your pass-keys a minute."

When he had taken the impressions in wax he handed them back with a short—"Thanks—I'll be calling again before long."

"And now, if we might use the office alone for a moment, Mr. Brenner," the Senator suggested courteously.

Brenner jumped up.

"Certainly—let me know if you want me any time," and was gone.

Lu Yan looked on in benevolent silence as the Senator turned to Wheeler.

"Dan— The name saves time, unless it offends your dignity?"

"Not so that I can't stand it," dryly.

"Dan, you recall telling me of certain strange talk of Garth's at the house of Lu Yan?" the Senator asked slowly.

"His crazy notion, about a se——"

"Not so crazy, perhaps," Sands interrupted with hand upraised, "as it was unwise and dangerous. I understand that he has done more of the same reckless talking—it is not necessary to go into details more minutely. What I want you to know is that he has made it impossible for some of us to support him any longer. Also he has offended every decent element of our citizenry.

"He must be checked, but he still retains a strong influence over certain corrupt and criminal elements in the city. We must not move before we are ready, but we intend to try persuasion—to get him to sell his real estate and leave the city. Could you run this club at a profit, yet so respectably that it would cause no serious complaint from the law-abiding residents?"

"Sure! This is a good town for a straight game. It would pay better to run it on the square," Dan answered promptly.

"Then we shall hope to put it in your hands as soon as practicable."

"Thanks!" Dan colored slightly. "I'll

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try to keep it decent. But, if it's any of my business, what's gumming the game? Why can't Garth be given the hook right now?"

"Chiefly the support of the—er—corrupt element I mentioned."

"Who are his two biggest crooks—the ones that pay Garth the most in graft-money?" Dan asked.

"Scotty the Crimp, and Ardmore," Sands answered without hesitation.

Dan nodded. He knew them. Scotty furnished crews for certain sea-captains by the method known as shanghaing. Ardmore, outwardly pious and respectable, owned a street of disreputable houses that paid rich rents.

"Ardmore collects Wednesday night?" Dan asked; and at Sands' nod he went on—

"And doesn't deposit until Friday or Saturday morning?"

"Yes—" Sands was director of the largest banks—"but I hope you are not thinking of——"

"Who, me?" Dan interrupted with lip curling. "I never think—bad habit! Suppose Ardmore found his cash missing, and could identify the money when it was found in Garth's possession. He wouldn't make any noise about it?"

Sands smiled and stroked his lip.

"It would be—delightful, but dangerous! Ardmore sleeps with his cash-box and a Colt." Sands' eyes twinkled.

"Thanks, I'll remember the Colt. If Ardmore's money was deposited in the National, properly marked, could you fix it so it would be used to pay Garth's first big check—to go to the Cascade Club?"

"I think so," the Senator said thoughtfully. "But do not run unnecessary risks—we are depending on you for business more important. If Garth could catch you——"

"Watch Garth catch *me!*" said Dan. "You don't know all my tricks yet." Turning to Lu Yan, "I shall be home before you," he said. Then, "Senator, I am bashful in these togs—would you mind looking into the hall to see if the coast is clear?" and wrapped his cue loosely round his neck.

"With pleasure." Sands jumped up, stuck his head out at the door to make a thorough survey of the hall, and then turned to announce:

"All clear at the moment. But before you go—wh-where——"

He stared from Lu Yan to the empty chair—even looked under the desk and opened the desk-cupboard—turning to Lu Yan again at length.

"Now how did he do that? And why? I don't like these conjuring tricks—I never knew a man to do them unless he had a screw loose mentally or morally. I thought Dan was above that sort of thing."

"I think you will find him so," said Lu Yan loyally, "but he has his small weaknesses like all of us, and he dislikes above everything to make a ridiculous appearance. His disguise was a mortification, and he did not fail to notice the smile with which you greeted him."

"Hm—so?" Sands reflected. "I am sorry I smiled. And my annoyance is the smaller trait of the two. I like him better than ever—please take him my sincere apology. And, Lu Yan, I really believe we have found *the* man!"

Lu Yan bowed as if he had received the apology and compliment himself, doing reverence to largeness of mind in any form. And he made answer:

"I believe we have, and none too soon. We need strong men at this crisis—and Drake can not come to our assistance too soon. It would seem as if Wheeler was specially sent us at this time."

"You are right," said Sands gravely. "I hope he will be careful. And as to Drake—he too will be in danger from the moment that Garth suspects that he has the other gem still in his possession. Has it occurred to you that the strange cruiser may be in the bay as a part of a definite plan? Garth has one of the jewels—suppose he could seize the other—go aboard the cruiser—up-anchor and away? Nothing but a naval battle could prevent the success of the pretender."

"It is true." Lu Yan frowned. "Drake is wise to keep the second gem hidden, and its hiding-place a secret."

"Then you do not know where it is?" the Senator turned on Lu Yan in surprize. "No—of course not—everything depends on that. The man who dares to carry it now will be in desperate danger, from the moment Garth discovers its whereabouts. Let us hope Garth still believes it lost with Wheeler." And Sands got up to pace the floor in agitation.

"I wish we had not let Wheeler try that scheme of his. If he is caught or recognized—then Garth will know. He will do

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something desperate—absolutely anything to insure success for his ambitious schemes—he will not hesitate to do any crime—any number of killings, if only he can get his hands on that gem. For then he will have the means of escape from justice as well as a great reward—I believe they have promised the man a title if he succeeds!" Sands was pale with excitement.

"*If* he succeeds," Lu Yan assented. "Personally, I have firm faith in our cause and our men—especially Drake and Wheeler."

"I hope—by the Lord—it's well founded," the Senator said devoutly.

CHAPTER XI

IN ONE of the many swell residences on the Hill, Ardmore had gone to bed like the respectable citizen he wished to appear to be. With his steel cash-box under his bed and his good Colt under his pillow he was sleeping the sweet sleep of a coal-heaver or a condemned criminal. He snored like a train in a tunnel, only now and then coming to a knot that threatened to strangle him—then plowing through it with an indrawn snort that all but brought him up sitting.

It was after one of the worst of these spasms, which had caused him to rear up, roll over and "chew air" like Grandfather Squeers, that he opened his eyes for a moment before falling back into his innocent repose. But into his half-awake consciousness was suddenly borne, in that open-eyed interval, an impression of an open window. It was the window over the porch—the one he had left closed! Cautiously he opened his eyes again, sliding one hand under the pillow to cuddle the handle of the gun. Something dark was between him and the light—something the size of a man's body, close to the bedside—and it moved!

Stealthily he drew the gun from under his head, turned it on the object before him and—it was taken away from him—snatched away over his shoulder from behind.

"I'll take it—it might go off and shoot a hole in your coat," said a quiet, comforting voice—also from the rear.

At the same time the light from a bull's-eye flashed on his coat, on its hanger, depending from his cane. Cane and all, it fell to the floor as the same voice cautioned him sharply:

"Sh-h! Not a peep!—Oh, very well!"

For despite the warning Ardmore had opened his mouth to yell, when a hand was chopped smartly across his Adam's apple—edgewise. It converted his shout into a faint "keek!"—like the cough of a hen choked on a chunk of dough.

Likewise it paralyzed all his muscles for the brief space necessary for his visitor to bind and gag him.

"You might have saved us all that trouble," said the burglar. "Keys are in your pants—right—and the thin one opens the box? A nice bale of kale!"

The contents of the box were dumped on the bed beside him—the light flashed on the pile of coin and notes.

"A pity we have to divide with Garth—all of us," said the chatty porch-climber, "when we do all the work. Now I'll show you why I did not put you to sleep with a rap on the nut to start with. I want you to identify this currency—the paper—when it is paid out over the roulette wheel at the Cascade Club. Garth will have his half before morning. I don't like it any more than you do—but he gets us; whipsaws us all the same way.

"See—I am putting a mark right here on George's white necktie where it will show—right where I gave you the chop that shut off your wind, so you can remember it. I'd go and tell Garth how you like it, if I were you—some of us other fellows are sick of being soaked—Garth is too raw!

"Sorry to take your time and money—same thing, you know—also that I must cause you more discomfort. I can't take chances on your getting out that gag and raising a holler. Good night—happy dreams!"

The numbness had left Ardmore's throat and he had furtively worked the gag aside enough to try a shout. He had just filled his lungs for the effort as his caller said good night.

Something jabbed stiffly at the base of his throat above the collar-bone—his chest was caught in a vise that crushed his breath out—a ringing roar—a flame of fire—he dropped into blackness.

IT WAS two hours later, in quite a different quarter of the city; and business was at its briskest in the bar and front room of Scotty the Crimp. Toughs, rough miners and foolish sailors

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lined the bar or sat at tables with hoarse, painted women.

At intervals a man and a woman passed through a door to the room in the rear—for one moment there would drift back through the open door the sound of a rattling banjo and a thrummed guitar, wafted on an air thick with alcohol and cheap perfume—the door would close. Some time later the woman would reappear to sit down again at one of the sloppy tables, but of all the men who passed through that door not one in ten came back. Some of them would wake in a gutter—some in the foul hold of an unseaworthy vessel, out of sight of land—some of them would not wake at all.

Behind the bar two bartenders served beer and whisky—the chief was an ex-pug with a mushroom-ear, and his assistant was another like him—and they were helped out in a rush hour by the proprietor himself.

Scotty was tall and round-shouldered, with a vicious lean face—the skin as smooth and white as a baby's—whose thin features belied his savage muscular power. He was said to have done many a bad-man to death with bare hands, and he reveled in the lethal reputation. Scotty put not his faith in new-fangled cash-registers, but kept a coldly fierce eye on his barmen. When the cash got deep in the drawer he transferred it to the inside of a leather vest made for the purpose.

Scotty had been watching a man in dark-green goggles who stood near the rear end of the bar. He saw him speak to the chief barkeep when that dignitary came back to absorb his periodic small-beer. But he did not see the stranger's white hand flicker over the small glass as it stood a moment on the bar. Neither did the barkeep, for he drank it at a gulp.

A few minutes passed. Scotty came from the rear room to see his chief bartender signaling for help with a sway of his close-cropped head.

"I'm sick!" he mumbled as Scotty came behind the bar, frowning and growling. "Cak—can't see nothink—S'k t' m 'stom—*Mmp!*"

And as he clapped a towel to his face Scotty elbowed him through the side door just behind him.

"*Git*, then!" Scotty growled. "G'wan out—don't puke on th' bar!"

And without a look behind him to see what became of the sick man, he reached for a wet towel and the black bottle as he asked Green Goggles—

"What's yours?"

The lean face beneath the goggles was tanned or stained, had queer lumpy cheeks and slick black hair pasted down to the brows. Scotty remembered that the man had limped as he came in, and noted that he was not overweight. He did not seem to be buying, so he scowled at him.

"I said what's yours? Buy or git!"

"I don't want a drink—I want a job for the night." Goggles leaned over the bar. "I can sling drinks and bounce a bum."

"Like —— ye can! Any husky guy would swallow ye whole. Git t' —— out o' here, ye —— ——! Hyar! Leggo!"

Scotty's flow of filth broke off with a yell. His hand, holding the mop-rag, was in a clip of steel that made the bones crunch, but his other hand came from under the bar holding a bung-starter.

Up and over in a swift circular sweep the crushing weapon drove true for the goggled head.

But the blow never landed. Caught overhead, the heavy weapon was jerked free with a back-twirl that caught Scotty's head a glancing knock, and Scotty saw gorgeous fireworks.

Through the swimming stars he also saw the man in goggles sailing over the bar lightly as a rocket. The next instant his arm at the shoulder ground with an agony that doubled him almost to the floor.

"Do I get the job or break your arm?" was hissed in his ear, and he saw his assistant barkeep sit down with a grunt caused by a foot placed violently in his midst.

"Yes —— —— ye! Leggo— E-e-e-eg!" The squeal was twisted out of him with one hand, but the instant he was allowed to stand up straight he reached for his gun.

"Here's your iron." Goggles waved it before Scotty tantalizingly. "But do I tend bar tonight for five and my keep, or do I shoot up the place?"

"Yes."

Scotty noticed that the man had his back to the open door. Also he noted the admiring grins on the faces that now thronged the other side of the bar. Goggles would have the crowd with him if he mixed it. He could fix the guy later, good and plenty.

"G'wan, get busy!" he muttered. "Gimme the gun!"

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"Careful now—I'm heeled!" cautioned Goggles, passing the gun muzzle-first and showing the handle of his own. "Put it up."

And as an extra exhibition he spun his own gun on his finger for a glittering second before it vanished into nowhere.

"You're a tough guy, all right!" Scotty conceded with a twisted grin.

"He has the grip of an orang-utan," he said to the gaping crowd as he stepped from behind the bar. "Don't try any games on that lad— Shut the door behind ye!"

For the door behind the bar, through which the sick bartender had gone, was still standing open into the dark alley.

Scotty was stowing away his gun when the slam of the door made him look up. Goggles was gone.

"Git him!" he yelled, scrambling at the door—clawing at his empty vest-pocket. "Fifty to the man that downs him. Shoot him. He frisked me——"

His shouts died away down the alley as he disappeared through the side door at a wild run. A few men jammed in the side door—still fewer tried the front—there was some shouting and chasing along the Gold Coast for a brief few minutes. It only served to advertise the joke on Scotty—frisked in his own joint! Ha-ha!

The regular roundsman on that beat told the story within five minutes to a young man with a lean, handsome face, somewhat tanned, and light, curly hair shading to black over the ears. The young man thought he had met the thief, and the copper thought afterward that he had seen those long greenish eyes before somewhere. They made you feel queer—kind of numb-like.

TO BE CONCLUDED

IF I HADN'T 'VE MOVED ALONG

by **T. M. Morrow**

WHEN I was a boy of twenty down around Cleveland way,
I knew a nice little chicken that went by the name of May.
Believe me—she was some kiddo. Yes, and I fell for her strong.
And I might 've married May too if I hadn't 've moved along.

I went from there to Chicago and there I met Annabelle.
She was as fine as they make 'em, regular tip-top swell.
"Queen of My Life" I called her—a girl that could do nothing wrong.
And I guess I'd 've married Annabelle if I hadn't 've moved along.

Out on the coast I met Lizzie, saucy and pert as could be,
And I said to myself, "Alphonsus, this sure is the one for me."
The hours I danced with Lizzie were one continuous song.
Yes, I bet I'd 've married Lizzie if I hadn't 've moved along.

Since then there's been nine or ten others like Jennie and Myrtle and Flo,
And a new face to put in my watch-case most every new place I go.
But I'm getting too old for the business. I like this fine little town;
I've made up my mind to stay here, get married and settle down.

There's a nice little girl that I've met here would make me a fine little wife.
When a man gets the wrong side of thirty it's time that he anchored for life.
Yes, Gertie's the one girl for Alphy. You're all wise—I'm going there strong.
And I'm sure goin' to marry Gertie if I don't have to move along.

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THE HOUSE OF THE STRONGEST

by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Village of the Ghost," "The Grand Cham," etc.

HE WAS Ermecin, the strong man. But that had not always been his name.

When he was a boy, he had raced with the other Buriat youths—and a Mongol horse-race is no brief gallop along leveled land. And when he did not win, which was seldom, the *ermecin*-to-be took from the winning youth by force the horse that was victor in the race.

In so doing the boy anticipated the practise of shrewd Chinese *tao-tai* (governors). Yet when Ermecin lived, two hundred years ago, the sinister authority of the Chinese, the "men of the hat and girdle" had not spread over the upper Mongolian plain where the fertile edge of the Gobi touches the green slopes of the Syansk.

This was the land of the free Buriats. They were hunters and herders, these Tatars, and the stranger was welcome within their tents. The youths wrestled and fought and vied with bow and arrow.

Ermecin was the strongest of the youths. Somewhere among his fathers had been a Chukchee, of the fisherfolk from the North. And in Ermecin appeared the flat, high shoulders, the massive, swinging arms and the small quick eyes of this ancestor.

Among the Buriat men was a *batyr*, a proved warrior. He had fought in the wars of Muscovy. Once in an inn during a horse festival, he drew his sword on Ermecin. The boy, now nearly at his full growth, twisted the weapon from the warrior and broke the man's neck with his hands.

The sword Ermecin kept. It was a heavy affair, a foot broad at the head. Its hilt had space for two hands. But the Buriat youth could swing it, whistling about his head, with one hand.

With the bow he was more deadly, for that was his natural weapon. He could keep a bowstring of reindeer gut twanging in the air like a minstrel's fiddle-string, while he buried a half-dozen shafts in the splintering trunk of a sapling.

After Ermecin had killed the *batyr*, men looked at him before they spoke. They began to chuckle when he threw visiting wrestlers crashing to the earth in the bouts at the horse festival.

It was noticeable that when Ermecin returned one day afoot to the *yurts* of the Buriats where the camp was clustered by the clear water of Ubsa Nor, no one laughed at him. Now a Mongol likes to make fun of a comrade, and to walk back, horseless from a hunting venture, is a predicament that invites fun-making.

Ermecin had gone after bear in the Syansk gullies among the peaks to the North. His closest friend had accompanied him.

One of the small savage bears had attacked the other Buriat, frightening the lad's horse, which threw him to earth. The bear had killed the hunter and made off. When Ermecin reached the spot, he cut the throat of his own horse without hesitation.

This was so the spirit of the horse could accompany the soul of his friend on the long journey through the sky where walking would be weary work. Ermecin hunted out

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rabbits and an antelope, hanging up their flesh as offerings to the spirits who flocked out of the sky to the spot where the soul of a man went from the body.

Concerning all this Ermecin said nothing. He was little given to words anyway; but the gossips of the *yurta* invested him with a stain of blood, because the two had gone hunting together and only one returned.

Over this Ermecin brooded. When there came to Ubsa Nor a caravan of Torgot brigands and many horses were stolen, he led the enraged Buriats in the battle that followed.

From it he gained many horses. Those who had seen him, his long mustaches flying in the wind, his shoulders hunched and his sword hacking through flesh, did not raise a voice against his possession of the bulk of the spoil taken from the slain enemies.

"He is Ermecin," they said, "the strong man. He is the strongest of us all. Hereafter what he wills to take he will take."

THERE was but one soul in the land between the Syansk and the Gobi that would not feel fear at the anger of Ermecin. And that was Cherla.

She had sprung from a line of chiefs and at one time a Manchu noble had been among her ancestors. Her back was straight as a horse's leg, her long hair dark as a horse's mane. She walked with pride among the Buriats, for she had been told that she was of the white-boned folk—the leaders of men. While Ermecin and the mass of the other Buriat hunters were, she believed, black-boned men, commoners.

Cherla had a smile like the flash of sunlight on a running brook. When her eyes softened, they were dark flowers. When she ran to gather in her father's cattle, the strength of her young body and its grace enchanted the eyes of men who watched her—and many did.

So was Cherla running, or rather skipping one noon where the beat of the sun was softened by a grove of ash. Ermecin saw her and whirled his horse across her path. When she halted, eyes flashing, he laid one hand beneath her chin.

He could feel the pulse beat in the round throat under his fingers. The girl's eyes burned into his, unafraid. Twice she struck him in the face but he did not move or speak.

That night Ermecin drove up to her father's *yurt* a herd of horses. The horses he gave to Cherla's father; the girl herself he took from the ring of her frightened sisters.

There had been no consulting of the match-makeress, no ceremony of the gifts of the night. Only one herder of Ermecin's rode before them and stuck into the right-hand wall of his master's tent the white-adorned arrow, and placed before the *yurt* itself the trunk of a young birch as a symbol of the fruit of the marriage.

But Ermecin had sent out couriers that afternoon and the Buriats gathered when he prepared a great feast of slaughtered sheep and horses, of richly brewed *kumiss*. Long into the night they ate and drank, and the father and brothers of Cherla were among the most drunk.

When Ermecin thrust his great body through the tent entrance after the feast Cherla did not give him the *nimeleu qatvarkin* the greeting from wife to husband. She sat erect on the bearskins, the bead band about her smooth forehead and the silver ornaments in her tresses seeming to mock the ice of disdain in her face.

"You are a beast," she said. "You have black bones."

And the disdain did not pass from her eyes until death came to the *yurt*.

CHERLA was not long in the *yurt*, for she ran away. Angry tears were in her eyes when she ran to the tents of her father and asked him to kill the beast Ermecin.

But when the master of many herds, the strongest of the Buriats, rode up to the tent where Cherla had taken shelter and dismounted without a weapon in his hand, no man drew sword or knife. Ermecin glanced at them all in turn and lifted Cherla in his arms. He flung the girl over the peak of his saddle and leaped behind her.

He rode home as if the foul fiend itself were after his horse. Not once did she cry out from the pain of the jolting or the bruising of the saddle-horn where it tore the skin from her soft flesh.

Ermecin flung her down in his *yurt* entrance and pointed at the fire.

"My woman," he said, and his deep voice was not hasty or loud, "I have paid the price of a girl. The birch has been planted in front of my house. I want to have sons so that the fire of my hearth will not go out."

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He pointed in turn to the weapons, the bows and spears on the felt wall of the tent, to the *kumiss* cask, and the cooking-dishes, to the woolen cloths from which garments were made, and the furs that covered the floor. He told her, as if he was talking to a refractory colt the things she must do for him. (Ermecin, in common with many Tatars, was gentle with horses, and used his voice in training them.)

"You are no better than a big beast," she said, her chin lifted. "I will never cease to hate you."

With a peculiar curiosity in his deep-set eyes Ermecin watched the slight form of his wife as she turned to prepare meat and mare's milk for the evening meal.

"Good," he muttered to himself at length; "she has mettle. She will bear me a rare son."

So Cherla was diligent in the care of the *yurt*, even while her pride was like a veil between them. Ermecin rode by day and sometimes by night over his lands, caring for his growing herds. But more often he was away fighting, or drunk at the festivals.

Among the Buriats, no male member of her family may look into the face of a woman that is married. Cherla sat alone in the tent, and when the match-makeresses gossiped to her about the mighty encounters of her husband her full lips pressed together and her eyes were cold.

Nor did she speak to Ermecin when he galloped up after two days in the saddle, to find a small hut built near his *yurt* and Cherla lying in pain among the old women who had clustered to a birth.

Custom forbade his going to the hut where Cherla was, but the old hags, after their kind, painted to him the suffering of his woman and said that the evil demon of sickness was within her.

Ermecin did not linger, but took two fresh horses from the group always kept near his *yurt* and spurred away toward the fastnesses of the Syansk where the clever witch-doctor Botogo had his hut.

Seventy miles he rode before dawn.

"We will take four fresh horses of your herd," he told Botogo, whose wrinkled face was intent and fearful. "And if you do not ride fast and send away the demon from Cherla, you will make magic for Erlik Khan in the place of the dead. Come!"

Alone among the Buriats, Ermecin did not respect the arts of the witch-doctor who could summon and dismiss the spirits of the sky. On the other hand Botogo was really afraid that his neck would be broken if Cherla should die. He made haste.

Seeing, when he came to the hut, that the woman was in no bad way, he regained much of his authoritative air.

"The demon," he admitted to Ermecin, "that has entered your woman is a *menkva*, a dark spirit of the secondary order."

Furthermore, he explained, to induce the demon to withdraw, it would be necessary to offer it a horse to ride away on, furs to dress in, and boots to cover its feet. Ermecin at once ordered them to be prepared and given to the witch-doctor, who fell to his hideous incantations and the hubbub of brazen gongs that was indeed enough to cure or kill a very sick person.

"The *menkva* has a brother," he informed Ermecin after a space, "who is more powerful than he. Three horses and more furs will be needed——"

"That is easily done," growled the master of the *yurt* impatiently.

Botogo wished he had asked for more. He was still afraid, however. Even after a son had been born to the exultant Buriat and the witch-doctor had been sent away with many additional presents, Botogo nursed his enmity against Ermecin. He had been frightened, and to frighten some men is to make enemies of them.

No need for him to have been frightened. A Tatar is hospitable, and his guests are looked upon as an honor. Ermecin especially liked to have numbers of visitors in his tents. When a traveler would halt, to explain that some of his horses had been lost, the big Buriat would laugh:

"What! Is that all, good sir? Dismount and drink, and before you have filled your belly I will have your horse here at the *yurt*. Look and see if I don't, now."

With that he would be off, on the first mount to hand. Being a skilled tracker and knowing the plain like a book, he would make good his promise, more often than not. If the stranger's horse should actually have disappeared, Ermecin would insist on giving another in its place.

"Will I have it said that a man was the loser by riding through my lands!" he would roar. "By the hide of Erlik Khan, I will not have it said! Come now, take your pick of this rotten herd, good sir. They are poor beasts at best."

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Despite the fact that his sword was feared from the Syansk to the Gobi, numbers of poverty-ridden Buriats hung about the quarters of the strong man. They ate of his meat, and laughed with him when he chuckled at the antics of his six-months-old son, when the boy would be brought to the fire by Cherla at his request of an evening.

"Look," he cried once, "the son of Ermecin can stand. Now we will see!"

With the back of his hand the warrior tapped the child gently on the chest. It fell over backward, bumping its head hard on the earth. But without a whimper it rose dizzily and stood, its sturdy legs planted wide.

"What did I say?" bellowed the delighted father. "It will be a strong one, like me. It has its life from the old buck, my friends, not from the doe."

And he got himself royally drunk for two days, and slept for a third.

"Eh," he chuckled when he woke and rose from the skins in his corner, none the worse for the long bout, "that is a boy out of my loins. He will be like his father, —— eat me if he isn't. Come, good sirs, we are getting fat as men of the hat and girdle with all this stuffing and swilling. Let's mount for the Syansk and a good run after a stag. Or better still, a few good blows at the Torgot Mongols."

It was noticeable that few of the henchmen who surrounded Ermecin's fires followed his horse as he galloped off to the hills. They knew that meat was always to be had from his servants, and that when he returned after a scrimmage or so there would be spoil to be gambled for because Ermecin was almost invariably the victor in the clan combats. At the time of his marriage he was in the fulness of strength. He was able to ride in the saddle for two days and a night, eating only a little as he rode. The experience of middle age had begun to cool the headstrong temper of his youth.

He seemed to stay home only to play with his son or to look over his herds. His home was spoken of as the *armaci-ralin*, the "house of the strongest."

But never when he came home did Cherla say the *nimeleu qatvarkin*, the "Hail, my husband!"

Sitting by the fire in the fine garments of silk that she made, studded with silver, she would stare into the smoke, her fine eyes half-closed; and only when she nursed the boy did the light of happiness come into her eyes.

THE boundary of the province of Cha-tsong Chien, *tao-tai* of the Northwestern banners, should have ended before the lands of the Buriats began.

Cha-tsong Chien, being a Manchu, was arrogant; and because a Manchu is of the same blood as the Tatars, he was a hardy person. He had been colonel of a thousand in the Manchu army, and his counsel had resulted in the successful storming of the walled city of Lan-liang, when his men had ripped up the houses and the women of a thousand merchants and sent the Mings themselves out of the world headlong, or, to be exact, shortened by a head.

As governor of the Gobi, Cha-tsong Chien pushed his boundaries into the fertile regions of the North, where Tatar horse herds and sheep made the game worth while. He encouraged wandering priests and mountebanks to bring him news of *yurts* within reach of his province where the plundering was good enough for an exalted person like Cha-tsong Chien.

There was little danger in this for Cha-tsong Chien, because the Tatar clans were so busy fighting each other that they could not unite to defend themselves. And reprisals across the Gobi against the soldiery of the Manchu were not to be thought of.

So Cha-tsong Chien was pleased one day in late Spring after the freshets of the Tatar mountains had abated, when he heard of a horse festival of the rival clans the Torgots and Buriats near Ubsa Lake. He headed there at once, taking in his haste only a half-dozen bowmen and a lesser number of servants.

He knew that by playing his rôle of governor and setting one clan against the other he could exact a goodly tribute of horseflesh without danger of armed conflict. If he brought more men, the Tatars might take it into their thick heads to withdraw to their home *yurts*.

So Cha-tsong Chien was riding toward Ubsa Nor when he met a solitary witch-doctor who saluted him servilely and fell into talk. This witch-doctor was Botogo, and he held the attention even of the exalted personage at his side when he related that the *yurt* and cattle of a wealthy Tatar were scarce a day's ride to the North, some distance from the Ubsa festival.

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"O my honorable father and mother," said Botogo—*ex officio* the Manchu governor was a magistrate, and the witch-doctor addressed him with the requisite title—"the Tatar is a thief and a murderer, and the men of his clan live in fear of him. He has raped women from the tents of his neighbors. He has angered the good spirits of the air."

Cha-tsong Chien merely grunted and asked again the size of the Tatar's herds and the name of the man.

"On his lands are as many head of horses and cattle as at the Ubsa festival, O Exalted Son of Benevolence and Justice. His name is Ermecin."

Seeing a flash in the black eyes of his superior, the witch-doctor hastened to say—

"Ermecin is at Ubsa Lake and by now is as drunk as a fish that lies on the land."

When, that night, Cha-tsong Chien drove the camels and travelers out of an inn, so his nostrils should not be polluted by the smell, he made much of Botogo and weighed silently in his mind the tales he had heard about the prowess of the strong warrior Ermecin against the veracity of Botogo, who said the Tatar was absent and drunk.

Dawn found Cha-tsong Chien riding fast with his men to the North, still silent, but wishing for a greater retinue. Then Botogo would have made excuses and left the cavalcade, but the *tao-tai* was no man's fool and kept him at his stirrup.

"If Ermecin and his riders are at the *yurt*, we will pay him out of our benevolence a visit of felicitation on the birth of his son."

Cha-tsong Chien knew the law of Tatar hospitality.

"And I will have heated mercury poured into your mouth to kill the devil of lies in your throat. If Ermecin is indeed at Ubsa, then—your two claws will have cool silver poured into them——"

The round face of the governor broke into a smile. He liked his jest. And he smiled the more when he found the *yurt* of Ermecin deserted by all but a brace of herders and one or two hangers-on who fled at the first glimpse of the embroidered coat of Cha-tsong Chien. One herder was off like an arrow; the other died fighting.

Cha-tsong Chien walked into the *yurt* of Ermecin. A servant woman groveled, and he kicked her out and peered into the shadows where a comely girl nursed a six-months-old child.

He watched while Cherla covered her breast and rose to stand before him. Cha-tsong Chien was even taller than Ermecin, though not so massive in shoulder and arm.

"Welcome to the *yurt* of Ermecin, *tao-tai*," she said in blundering Manchu. "I am of the blood of your august fathers, and I can try to serve the guest fittingly. Will you be pleased to sit until Ermecin can be sent for?"

Cherla's heart was pounding under the embroidered silk of her tunic. She had often thought with reverence of the governor across the border. He was of the white-boned caste, and the splendors of his palace must be beyond telling.

But his moist eyes seemed to her like the eyes of a fish. Why had the soldiers of the governor struck down the herder? Cherla did not understand; she only knew that she was Ermecin's wife and must extend the hospitality of Ermecin's ill-suited tents to the august visitor.

The glance of Cha-tsong Chien ran around the weapons on the walls and came back to the woman as a group of his men clustered in the *yurt* entrance.

"Break those bows and spears," he commanded at length. "Fetch in the cattle and horses to the last one. Not until then can you have this woman for your sport. Make haste!"

Now as the men were tearing down the weapons from the felt sides of the tent one of them stepped upon the child, which began to cry. Indifferently the soldier picked it up and tossed it to earth to silence it.

Cherla's heart stood still. But the son of Ermecin wriggled about on the furs where he had fallen and stood up, his fat legs planted wide.

"A strong boy!" exclaimed Cha-tsong Chien in surprize. "Aye, and there may be Manchu blood somewhere in his veins. We will take him with us."

With a scream Cherla cast herself over the boy, hugging him to her. Two bowmen tried to drag her away from the child. In her slender body was a surprizing strength.

It was minutes before they had beaten her unconscious with the butts of their weapons. They tore the silver ornaments from her silk garment and in so doing ripped the tunic from her.

Cha-tsong Chien jerked them back angrily.

"Dogs—get you to the herds. We must be off at once. Give the child to a coolie to tie to his horse."

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BOTOGO had spoken the truth, yet not quite all the truth. Ermecin was at the horse festival; but he was not drunk. In fact drink never kept him off his feet, and just then he was watching the horse-races with critical appreciation.

When the herder from his *yurt* galloped up on a steaming beast and shouted to Ermecin, the big Tatar became dead sober in that moment. In the next he was on his horse and off, over the plain.

The burning stacks of hay, the broken corrals and the tumbled huts of his followers he took in with a glance. Passing by a group of curious and silent Buriats he strode into his *yurt*, now empty of skins and ivory and ornaments and filled with broken weapons.

"Where is the son of Ermecin?" he asked his wife, scarcely noticing her torn clothes and the sweat on her disordered hair.

His deep voice was slow as if it had been dragged forth from his chest. His veined hands clasped and unclasped on his belt. Only his eyes glowed as if from a fire within.

"They have taken him away from you," she wailed. "They have taken him from me and put him on a horse while you were drunk at the festival. Oh, you are a beast, you are a beast!

"They threw him on the ground," she cried, pointing to the spot. "But he did not die, because he is strong, strong. And they have taken him away from you, you——"

Ermecin had passed from the *yurt*. Cherla dragged herself to the entrance in time to see him go to the best of the horses that the Buriats had ridden up—the Buriats who had been his guests. As she watched the big, stooped figure gallop off alone after circling the *yurt*, there was a curious fire in her dark eyes. Her lips moved as if she was praying.

WHEN the outpost that Cha-tsong Chien had stationed in the rear of his caravan of animals rode up to report a single horseman coming over the long slopes in the plain where the plain is like the waves of the sea, meeting the sand of the Gobi, Cha-tsong Chien smiled for the first time in some hours.

It was then nearly dusk. The one rider, so reasoned the *tao-tai*, could be disposed of by his bowmen. Then night would fall. Their course across the northern corner of the Gobi would be undisturbed, and by dawn they would be beyond reach of any really formidable pursuit.

So he called in three of his bowmen, and then a fourth, from the herd. The two other bowmen and all the servants but one that carried Cha-tsong Chien's sword were needed to drive the uneasy animals.

The Tatar, Cha-tsong Chien mused, would rush up like an angered ox and would be stuck full of arrows in a trice.

The six men sat their horses with bowstrings taut and arrows fitted, while the pursuer galloped up over a rise and gave a shout at seeing them.

"Wait until he is close," ordered the *tao-tai*. "The light is bad."

Actually he was willing that one or two of his men should be shot down—he knew the skill of a Tatar archer—in order that the others should make sure of their kill. As for Cha-tsong Chien, he had a breastplate of Turkish steel under his robe. He had inherited it from his fathers and found it useful at times like this.

The rider headed toward them, and they saw a short, massive bow gripped in his left hand.

"Wait," counseled Cha-tsong Chien as his men stirred, "another spear's throw."

But then the rider swerved and began to circle the group at the full speed of his horse. As the herds with their guards had passed on, the plain about the Chinese was clear.

"*Hai!*" he shouted. "*Hai—hai!*"

With each cry he loosed an arrow. The shafts came as if expelled from a siege-engine. One of the bowmen was knocked to earth, transfixed. The horse of another screamed and went to its knees.

The volley of arrows from the bowmen went wide, falling behind the bent figure that seemed to skim the ground on its shaggy pony. The Chinese bows were longer than the Tatar weapon, but their tension was less. Their shafts at that distance did not carry in a straight line, while they could scarcely see the darts of the Tatar that whirred in the air.

Cha-tsong Chien heard a thud, and saw the skull of a horse beside him shattered as a shaft hit.

"That is Ermecin!" cried his servant. "He is a champion. We must fly."

"Dog!" roared the aroused official, striking the man with the flat of his sword.

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"We are four and he is one—a Tatar."

Lifting his voice Cha-tsong Chien bellowed for his men with the herd to leave the animals and ride up.

"Shoot down his horse!" he instructed his archers.

By an accident his followers made good his wish. The frightened servant turned his mount to flee. Ermecin halted his beast, took time to direct an arrow, and the coolie was knocked sprawling. But the moment's pause gave the Manchu bowmen their chance, and Ermecin's horse went down.

"We have him now," announced Cha-tsong Chien. "Let us await our comrades."

They waited long. Ermecin trotted off into the dusk in ungainly fashion. He was little used to being on his own feet. Presently he appeared again on another knoll, mounted. Following the herd, he had caught a stray horse and in doing so had met with one of the returning archers and killed him.

The other soldier and the servants remained hidden in the plain, perhaps not hearing the governor's shout, perhaps unwilling to ride into the danger that lurked in the deepening dusk.

Cha-tsong Chien felt a cold chill steal up the base of his stout neck at sight of the Tatar rider returning. But he made up his mind quickly.

"We must attack him," he said. "Come, a handful of gold to the one who lets out his life."

By keeping his distance and harassing the Chinese through the night, Ermecin would have fulfilled the wisdom of his experience. But at sight of them riding toward him, all the cool strategy life had taught him deserted him. Was Ermecin to turn his back on his foes?

So perhaps had Cha-tsong Chien reasoned as he kept prudently behind his men. Ermecin stood his ground. It was nearly dark.

MASTERLESS groups of horses galloped by the band of Buriats, who followed cautiously by torchlight the trail of the herd that night.

"That is good," they said. "Ermecin has scattered the Chinese, and the herd seeks its home pastures. Aye, there are the cattle, going back."

Some left the torches to carry off beasts from the groups that straggled back. They preferred to steal in the dark because there was no telling when Ermecin might ride up to them. Had not the Chinese left the herd?

They halted at a place where two dead bowmen lay, with a coolie stretched out a short distance away. From here they followed horse tracks for the distance of a bowshot.

"Ah, here was a fight for you, good sirs," they assured each other as they halted a second time.

A Manchu bowman, doubled up, was under their feet, an arrow projecting from his back. A few yards farther on they heard a groan. It came from another of the Chinese soldiers, his clothing torn, his hands dark with dried blood. The man's chest was cut nearly in two, and the air bubbled from his severed lungs as he struggled, dying, for breath.

Under him lay a Manchu body without a head. And near these two was the tall form of Cha-tsong Chien, the silk robe ripped from his mail, the steel hacked and bent. His sword was in his hand. He was quite dead, and the ground here was trampled as if two heavy bodies had churned it with their feet.

The broken halves of Ermecin's sword was here also, but of the Tatar warrior they saw no trace until they heard a thin cry in the night air. Others of their band who had investigated the plain reported that the Chinese coolies must have fled.

"Then that was a spirit of the sky crying to us," observed Botogo the witch-doctor, who was far from at ease. "They have snatched up Ermecin, for he is not here and he did not ride back to his *yurt*——"

Botogo spat on the form of the Manchu, and the others stared at him in awe.

Nevertheless Ermecin was there. When they followed the sound they had heard they found him on the ground, his body drooped forward, propped up on one elbow, his head and shoulder on the grass. His bare chest was agape with wounds, and he had bled out his life some time ago.

Under his kneeling form was the plaintive, struggling bundle of his child.

They took the boy back to Cherla, while fires were lighted about the *armaci-ralin*, the house of the strongest, and the Buriats flocked to eat roasted sheep and drink up the stores of *kumiss* beside the hut where Ermecin lay. Botogo was there in his rôle of master of ceremonies, for which he would be well paid.

Cherla sat in the *yurt* entrance, clad in a

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new dress, her tresses ordered. She was staring blankly into the fires.

"Only once did she speak," said the gossip crones to the men who surrounded the fires. "That was when the body of Ermecin was brought in to her. We have not heard her say it before. She said, '*nimeleu qatvarkin*—hail, to my husband.'"

Cherla however spoke again before the night was done. A gleam came into her dark eyes when the baby, hungry, began to pummel at her breasts with its sturdy fists.

"Ah, you, too, will be an *ermecin*, a strong man."

And in her voice was tenderness and a great pride.

THE OATMAN MASSACRE

by E. A. Brininstool

ONE of the most widely discussed incidents in connection with the earlier Apache troubles in Arizona, is the melancholy fate of a family of nine persons named Oatman, en route from Illinois to California by the old Santa Fé trail, in the Spring of 1851.

The Oatman family had started with quite a caravan from Independence, Missouri. Dissension arose, however, among the emigrants toward the latter part of their journey and some of the party decided to continue by another route. The Oatman family continued alone, and after reaching the Gila River encountered untold hardships. Their supplies were nearly exhausted and their oxen suffering severely from lack of sufficient feed and water. About the nineteenth of March, while the Oatmans were urging their jaded oxen up a steep hill on the trail, nineteen Apache Indians came walking along the road toward them. In Spanish, with which Mr. Oatman was conversant, they demanded something to eat. He was forced to accede to their demands.

After eating, the savages drew aside and held a secret council. Suddenly, with fierce whoops and yells, they threw themselves upon the helpless family, and in a few moments six of them lay dead or dying. The boy, Lorenzo, was knocked down, badly mauled with a war-club and supposed to be dead. Olive and little Mary Ann, aged fourteen and seven, respectively, were jerked roughly aside, and the Apaches hurried away into the desert with their young captives.

After the recovery to consciousness of Lorenzo Oatman, he noted that Olive and Mary Ann were not with the rest of the murdered family and realized that they had been taken captive. He dragged himself along the trail for two days, and finally was discovered by two friendly Pimole Indians out on a hunt.

He was later found in a pitiable condition by a party of emigrants bound for California. They took Lorenzo along with them, and after months of suffering the boy recovered, and immediately set about to rescue his two unfortunate little sisters.

Meantime, Olive and little Mary Ann Oatman had been taken to the Apache village where they were most inhumanely treated. Knowing that escape was impossible, and that even if they attempted it they would probably die on the great desert, they tried to reconcile themselves to their new life. The hardest work about the camp was thrust upon these helpless children. Little food was given them. After a year of the most cruel treatment that barbarity could invent, the girls were sold to a wandering band of Mojave Indians, and a journey of three hundred and fifty miles was made across the burning desert to their village, the little girls walking the entire distance.

A year of intense suffering and starvation was here borne, until finally little Mary Ann succumbed from want of proper food. Olive remained a captive with these Indians nearly three years longer, until her brother learned of her whereabouts and condition while he was living near Los Angeles in the little town of El Monte. Through the efforts of a civilian at Fort Yuma, and the promise to the Mojaves of a liberal reward, Olive Oatman was finally ransomed and brother and sister again united.

For years this incident was the talk of the entire Pacific Coast, and historians of the present day agree that the captivity of the Oatman sisters is one of the most widely discussed among all such incidents of Indian and frontier life in the Far West.

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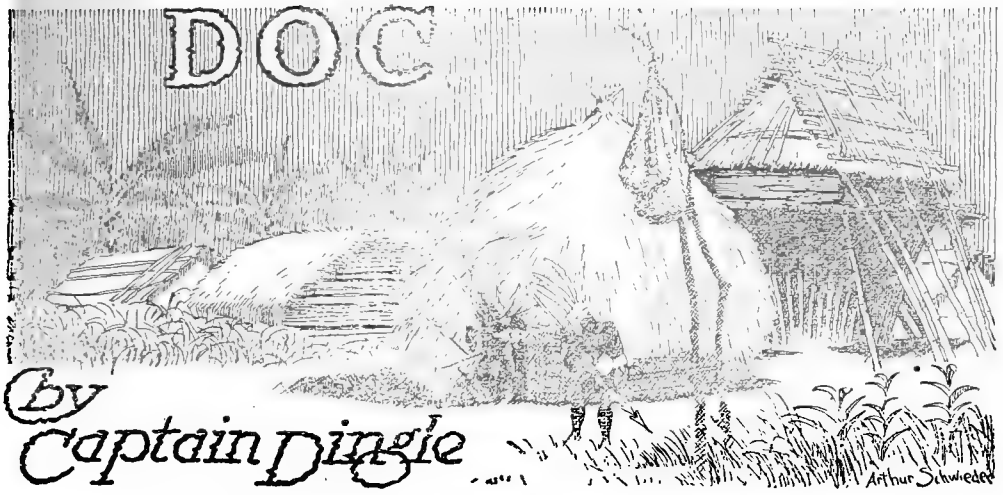

by Captain Dingle

Author of "Red Saunders' Protégé," "Mickey's Marquis," etc.

IT WAS a queer friendship to develop in the pestilential river estuaries and surf ports of the Gold Coast, and not the least queer part about it was the fact that Captain Belfort was a man who had numbered, and might yet have numbered his friends by the score, while Doctor Ross possessed apparently only one friend in the wide world—the captain of the ship in which he served as surgeon.

That was what puzzled men, for of all the types that exist, it would be hard to find two so hopelessly opposite. Belfort was still young, though he had fallen from grace as a naval officer and was reduced to the command of a smelly, bug-infested little coastwise passenger steamer on a steamy, fever-soaked route; and he was of the strong, good-looking sort that never lacks friends of one sex or the other.

In Belfort's case the women deserted him first, chiefly because he wanted them to, and forced them to by his open and shameless dissipation in other things besides liquor. But he retained many of his men friends, for in his drug-free moments he was a jolly comrade and a good fellow.

Ross was as different as possible. A good bit older than Belfort, he was as coldly grim as his own Highland crags. Knowing him, it was easy to visualize those dour old Covenanters who stubbornly refused to swerve from their beliefs in spite of armies and threatened damnation.

"A mon's worrd is no t' be gi'en nor tak'n wi'out thocht!" was one of his queer sayings. And this: "Gin ye pairrmit a mon t' ca' ye friend, ye're bluid o' his bluid for aye; ye've no longer body or soul o' yer ain, but ye're his."

Men laughed at Doc's strange notions, and dubbed him The Granite Oracle, and yet there was a subtle strain of humor in him, as revealed to a jaundiced missionary taking passage along the Coast to take overseas ship on sick leave.

"Ye're sick, and ye come to me?" Doc uttered as he felt the man's pulse. The missionary was notorious wherever Coasters dwelt, for he was one of that meddlesome lot who cannot stick to their native flock, but ever and again drift into the white man's quarters and start a prayer meeting in which they piously pray for the sins of their hosts, which sins are rarely heavier than a little profanity and more or less indulgence in alcoholic beverages—both of small account as sins in such a country.

"No doot ye're vairry sick, parson," mused Doc, letting go the man's wrist and mixing up a bolus. "Tak' this. Ye'll notice, ma' friend, there's a wee bit difference in oor methods. I've hearrd that ye tell the benighted heathen to pray when they're sick o' some fever ye can't understand. I've hearrd that ye tell 'em yer prayers will cure them, and then ye give 'em a dose o' salts as a sort o' second string to yer prayers." Doc stopped stirring the deadly looking decoction and put it to the man's lips.

"Drink it all up, my manny. That's

"Doc," copyright, 1921, by A. E. Dingle.

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vairry good!" The missionary spluttered and all but choked as the vile mess passed down his gullet, and his eye looked reproachfully at the grim Scot, who went on pitilessly—

"Ye see I do otherwise. I gi' ye a good physicking fairst, and leave ye to pray it worrks. I ask ye who's the better doctor, little man."

Yes, there was something queer in the friendship of Belfort and Doc Ross, and it was never more sharply in evidence as when they sat together in the little surgery on the evening of getting in to Sekondi, where the missionary man left them for a homeward-bound steamer.

There could scarcely be a greater contrast in two men. At Doc's elbow a tall tumbler stood, half full of good Scotch whisky and soda, for Doc was no despiser of the gifts of the gods. Belfort's glass was empty, unused. The bottle and siphon stood beside him, but he made no attempt to take a drink, and Ross watched him narrowly.

"Mon dear, I ha' doots o' yer wisdom in denying yersel' o' guid liquor entirely. A mon wants something oot on this —— coast. Ye're no getting restless for the ither stuff again?"

Belfort laughed, with little mirth in his laughter, and his eyes shiftily avoided Doc's stern look.

"Oh, don't rake up that old stuff again, Doc!" he returned peevishly. "Didn't I give you my word? Where should I get dope if you shut down on me?"

"Aye, laddie, ye passed yer worrd," said Doc quietly, and his steady gaze searched the other man's pale face. "Ye passed yer worrd, and a mon disna gi' his worrd to a friend wi'oot guid will to keep it, I ken. Then tak' ye a dram, laddie. I prescribe it. Yer nairves are all in bights, like a Spaniard's riggin'."

He canted the bottle over Belfort's glass.

"No!" The captain stood up impatiently. "Whisky tastes like bilge to me somehow. I'll take a walk out past town, that's all I need—exercise."

"Wait, then." Ross went into his inner den where he slept. Belfort's eyes glittered with cunning as he realized that he was left alone. Swiftly, as one who knows his ground, he opened a drawer in the surgical cabinet, took out a flat case and slipped it into his pocket as Doc returned.

"Here, laddie," smiled Doc, as indulgently as his grim features would permit. "Swallow a couple o' these pellets. I don't prescribe 'em. I keep 'em for my ain deesipation, y' ken. Twa won't hurt ye, an' they'll set yer nairves up brawly."

Belfort took them and put them into his mouth, but did not swallow them. Muttering thanks, he hurried out and went to his own room up on the bridge-deck, spitting out the pellets with a curse as he mounted the ladder. Then, laughing unpleasantly, he locked his door behind him.

It was fifteen minutes later that Doc watched him go ashore, and his step was jaunty and free swinging, his face alight with vitality. The kindly Scot went back to his hammock and book entirely satisfied.

BELFORT had not returned when the cabin dinner was served; but it occasioned no uneasiness in the officers, who were hard-bitten Coasters and knew a man's weaknesses. Doc alone knew that Belfort's weaknesses were not those of the run of men, and as the hours passed on towards midnight he became uneasy.

He was about to turn in, not to sleep, but to await the return of Belfort, when the mate, Mr. Braid, stepped in for a dose of quinin. Doc opened the cabinet and stiffened from head to toe; but he gave the mate his quinin, and closed the drawer again.

"The old man's ashore, isn't he, Doc?" remarked Braid with a knowing smile.

"Aye, Mister Braid, he's to some pairty or ither at the Club. I'm to go there to meet him in a minute or twa. Guid nicht, t' ye." Unmistakably he urged Braid outside; then, shutting fast the door, he hurriedly sought through every part of his surgery before standing up and reaching for his jacket again.

His face was set and gray as he hastened down the gangway and strode through the town. He passed the Club without a look inside, and struck off into the country beyond the stone buildings as if he knew quite well where Belfort was most likely to be found.

"Puir, puir laddie!" he muttered as he almost ran through the outskirts of the first native quarter. "He'll no be able to fecht it wi'out a shairp jolt to buck him up. I doot I'll ha' to gi' him one."

Suddenly he swung aside from the open path and entered a narrow crevice between two native houses. In one a dim light shone through the screens, and he darted inside,

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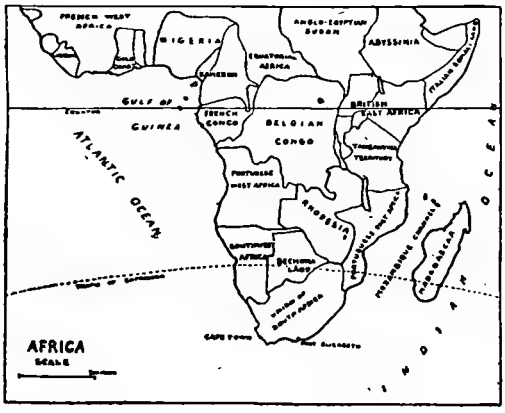
bowling aside a startled native who leaped up from a sleeping mat to bar the way.

Voiceless and resistless as a glacier, and as cold, he tore down a wall screen, burst into a squalid room, and glared around.

The place was empty. And all about him shrill voices chattered protests against his intrusion. He turned back.

"Awa' wi' ye, chattering loons!" he gritted, thrusting through them and emerging into the road again. He had drawn blank in a place which he had thought must surely hold the drug-enslaved Belfort.

Once before he had found him thus, after a fall from grace; and there were signs that the skipper had not only betaken himself to the natives to drug himself without interference, but had entered into the native under-life to an extent not good for a white man.



"Ah, weel, maybe I misjudge the laddie this time." He sighed heavily as he climbed the gangway and went to his room. Throwing off his jacket and cap, he passed on to the captain's room, hopeful, yet not sure of finding the erring one there.

He was shocked mildly to find Belfort asleep in his bunk, fully dressed. Listening to his breathing, Doc shook his head gravely.

He rolled up a sleeve and felt the pulse. Roughly he began to push the sleeve higher up the arm, his eyes glittering terribly. Belfort awoke with a start, realized what was going on, and sat up cursing.

"What the —— are you up to?" he blared, snatching furiously at his sleeve. Doc went on pushing the cloth towards the elbow, peering steadily into the skipper's convulsed face. There were rings about Belfort's eyes, and a smear of white under one jaw, as if some unguent had been imperfectly wiped off.

"Belfort, what ha' ye done wi' my hypodermic case?" asked Doc quietly. In spite of the man's struggles he had now bared the arm to the elbow and was staring at two tiny punctures in the muscular forearm.

"Confound you, Doc! What d'you mean?"

"What ha' ye done wi' it, laddie?" persisted Doc. He let the arm fall, and shook his grim, gray head. "Ye're no a liar as weel as thief, are ye?"

Belfort leaped to the floor, misjudged his strength, and would have fallen but for Doc's arm thrown about him.

"By —— Ross! I'll hammer you for that!" he stormed, making a wild pass at the impassive face bending over him.

"And so ye shall, laddie." Doc bent a searching look on Belfort's face, which was drawn and pallid for all his bluster. "An' if ye'll no say where ye've hidden yon hypodermic, I'll ha' to gi' ye a shot fra' my own case afore I let ye pummel me, or ye'll no be able to stand what I mean to gi' ye mysel'.

"Oh, Robbie Belfort, Robbie Belfort! 'Tis a sad man ye've made me this day. I ha' thocht ye foolish, an' a leetle weecked, but never was I ha' believed ye'd steal, an' then lie aboot it. Come along to my room."

Belfort followed him snarling savagely. His fingers ached to tear at his friend; his nerves refused to obey him. And his being cried out aloud for stimulant! Silently, ignoring all curses and threats, Doc injected a stout dose of heart and nerve stimulant, and carefully locked the outfit away.

Then he stood at the door and kept his eyes full on Belfort's face.

"Now, Robbie, we'll settle this," he said. "I'm goin' to hammer ye, as mon to mon, for ye've stole and lied. Gin ye cry 'enough,' I'm yer friend still. If ye whup me, ye can go yer ain way and be —— to ye. But ye won't laddie, ye won't.

"I gave ye my friendship, and I'm yer friend for aye, so I needs must pummel ye. Come doon behint the funnel. We'll no be seen."

BELFORT'S nerves had steadied, his eye cleared. He stepped outside, and led the way to the place suggested. Arrived there, he flung aside jacket and shirt, and snarled while Doc stripped:

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"Ross, I've had more than enough of your —— nursing. I warn you now you're finished. For the few minutes I'll take to thrash you, I'm Belfort and you're Ross. Afterwards you'll find I'm captain of this steamer and you're a subordinate.

"You'll answer to me as your superior for insolence, intrusion, and insubordination. Now get busy!"

"Ah, manny, I weesh I was ten year younger!" sighed Doc, and hurled himself upon Belfort's driving fists. Sheer Scot's impetuosity and righteous wrath enabled Doc, for all his years, to match Belfort's drug-stimulated strength and greater skill in contest.

For three minutes the fight was a real one. The lights on the wharf shone upon the battling men and showed them ever at close quarters, neither giving nor asking space for finesse.

Belfort sported a puffed eye which rapidly darkened. A trickle of crimson ran from his lips to his chest. On Doc's rugged face sat grim determination, made ghastly by reason of a cruel gash at the temple, from which blood flowed fast.

It was at this particularly gory stage that the quartermaster wandered that way. But neither saw him. He watched them pop-eyed for a full minute, saw Doc stagger hard against the stem of a boat, and totter forward into a flurry of punches—and fled to bring up Mr. Braid.

Mr. Braid arrived seething with excitement to find the boat-deck spotted with red, but no fight. He ran down and knocked on the captain's door, asking if anything was wrong.

"No, no! There's nothing the matter!" snapped Belfort viciously from within.

"But the quartermaster said Doc was——"

"Oh, go to blazes! The quartermaster's drunk! Don't come here bothering me, Mr. Braid. I'll send for you when I need you."

Mr. Braid was a man who was rarely beloved by his fellow officers, because of a certain habit of nosing into a mystery until he solved it. He might rise high as a commander for those very same faults, or, strictly, merits. However, he shook his head sagely, left the bridge, and proceeded straight to the surgery, which he entered without the formality of knocking, as was the right of an equal ranker.

"Asleep, Doc?" he whispered, in doubt, for the cabin and surgery were in darkness. Cautiously he switched on the electric light. Doc was standing by his bunk, half undressed, and when he turned to investigate the intruder Braid saw his battered face.

"Hullo! What's up?" he inquired. "Then it was right?"

"Richt? Up? Mon, ye're wool-gatherin'!" drawled Doc, slipping out of his clothes coolly. "Go to yer bed, and let honest and harrd worrkin' men sleep."

"But the scrap? Weren't you and the skipper——?"

"Hech, hech! Wull ye no stop blatherin' and go to yer bed?" Doc cut in, gently shoving Braid toward the door.

The mate departed wagging his head. He decided that the matter deserved sleeping on anyhow, since neither Captain Belfort nor the Doctor was in a mood to talk just then.

He poured himself a stout peg of whisky and quinin, and slept the sleep of righteousness. At six his boy awakened him; at six-ten he went to the skipper's room for daily orders; at six-twelve he burst in upon Doc, who was bathing his bruised face.

"Doc! The Old Man's not in his room, and his bunk's not been slept in!" he announced, fired with excitement. He was well disposed towards Doc; but duty compelled him to see possibilities, and among these were the natural conclusions one would draw after hearing the quartermaster's report of that midnight conflict, and seeing with his own eyes that blood-spattered boatdeck.

If the Old Man had met with foul play——

"Gone?" exclaimed Doc sharply. "Ha' ye looked in the saloon? The skipper's getting his morrning tea, likely, or he's in his bath. Ye're all jangled up, mon. Tak' yer quinin dose, and dinna starrt blatherin' so early in the morrn. 'Tis bad enough for ye to be blatherin' at midnight!"

THE mate vanished hurriedly, but Doc was uneasy for all his show of indifference. He dressed swiftly and went to see for himself. The bunk had been undisturbed, as Braid said. There was no trace of even hurried departure.

The skipper's uniform lay on the settee, and his shore suit of white drill, and his sun

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helmet, were missing. The mate returned with the watchman while Doc was there.

He glanced keenly at the wide gash on Ross's temple. In the broader light of the upper bridge-deck it looked ghastly enough. The quartermaster grinned behind his hand at sight of it, too. It would give him something to babble about in mess for a long time.

"Weell?" snapped Doc.

"He's gone ashore," said Braid, stupidly. "Quartermaster says he walked down the gangway dressed even to gloves and cane about one o'clock."

"Yussir, went t'wards back o' town, the skipper did, sir," the man cut in. "Dressed same as daytime, he wos. Says to me, he says, 'Tell Mr. Braid—' Then he run on down the gangway, an' never finished wot he was sayin', sir!"

"Was he— Did he look ill?" snapped Doc. "Did he walk as if his legs could carry him?"

"Ho, yus," grinned the sailor, knowingly. " 'Is legs wos proper strong, no error! He run past them sheds faster 'n I could, sir."

Doc left them without a word. Later, while Mr. Braid went up to the office and reported the steamer ready for sea, but no captain on board, Doc took a policeman and turned the native village upside down and inside out, but to no effect.

In the den he had visited the previous night they found an ancient, hideous bit of withered humanity grotesquely bedecked with feathers and teeth, beads and paint—a near-civilization travesty on the witch-doctors of the hinterland.

Powerless himself for harm, the old villain could still teach such white men as cared to learn enough of the secrets of Ju-Ju to whet the appetite for more. And Doc knew that Belfort had visited the place before. But he returned to the ship empty-handed and void of heart—for he knew his friend, and feared that this last would prove, in truth, an outbreak.

Finding that the steamer was to wait for the outward-bound mail, due the next day, Doc enlisted the aid of two of the meanest ruffians in Sekondi and spent the whole twenty-four hours combing town and near-by villages.

His aides' meanness and ruffianism were merits in the circumstances, since no other sort of white men would possess their intimate acquaintance with the kind of places to be searched. But the search proved fruitless. Belfort seemed to have vanished as utterly, as if a transcontinental aeroplane had snatched him up.

Doc left word with a few of his most-to-be-trusted club acquaintances, who could be depended on to make quiet inquiries without spreading the news broadcast, and joined the ship in dismal spirits.

Braid took over the command, and carried the ship to sea. He showed his appreciation of the service Doc had rendered him in a manner that caused the Scot's grim visage to harden ominously.

"I'm not going to rake up old sores, Doc," Braid told him, "but I'll say I have to thank you for my promotion. It must have been a whale of a hiding you gave him, to make him run away like he did. Humiliation, I suppose. Well, it's too bad. I rather liked Belfort."

It took Doc three minutes to catch his breath before he answered Braid:

"Captain Braid, ye're my superior officer th' noo, and I ha' no doot whatever that ye merit the poseetion. But in regarrd to Robbie Belfort, ye know no more than yon anchor. I did na 'rayther like him', as ye did: he was my friend.

"I'll thank ye kindly, Captain Braid, if ye'll confine yer remarrks to ship's duty in future, unless ye can leave Belfort out o' yer conversation."

Braid departed in high indignation, for he considered he had shown Doc Ross great honor in continuing to treat him as an equal. Braid was a man who stood stiffly on the dignity of rank, though not by any means a bad sort of fellow at bottom. His fault was that he could not any more than other men, probe under the tough exterior of Doc Ross.

DOC was deep in a rummage of Belfort's effects a moment after Braid left him. The steamship agents in Sekondi had put the vanished skipper's affairs in his hands, as being his most intimate friend; and a first cursory examination of Belfort's papers did not even divulge the man's home address or the address of his people.

Yet Doc knew quite well that the Belforts were people of distinction, and he refused to believe that his friend's fall from grace in the navy had so utterly sent him to the

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bow-wows as to cause him to sever all home ties. Hence his fresh search.

The discovery of a flat case made Doc screw his lips tightly, for it reminded him poignantly of that other case that had precipitated all the trouble. But this one contained no drugs. Rather, it contained what should have taken the place of all stimulants forever; for it was Belfort's private hoard of secrets—the container of letters from the father and mother who still believed in him.

Doc read one of them, and felt no shame in thus prying into such secret matters. It ran:

So glad to know how well you are getting on, Robbie. Perhaps you were wise after all in resigning from the navy when you did, since your prospects in the passenger service are so splendid. Your mother is delighted every time we receive a letter from you—but, Robbie, don't make it too long before you let us see you. Mother said only today (she was feeling a bit blue, I think) that absence was as bad as death among loved ones. She said she could almost endure the thought that you were dead, and in an honorable grave, rather than that you were living in such a climate as we hear the Gold Coast is and never seeing you to satisfy herself that you are as well as you tell her you are. (That's mother's love for you, Rob! Did you ever see an old hen with her brood? All mothers are alike, I believe. Bless 'em!)——

Doc read no more. His gray eyes misted over, and he took a half-tumbler of good Scots' whisky to brace himself against the unpardonable sin of showing emotion. The letter had given him one thing greatly desired—Belfort's address at home—and the rest might wait.

Next time the steamer put into Sekondi, Doc Ross quit, much to the astonishment of everybody.

The astonishment was intensified tenfold when he volunteered as surgeon for a punitive expedition of W. A. A. F.'s about to proceed up country against the Adansis, who were making trouble around Coomassi. Rumor had been busy about that uprising.

The Adansis had achieved such stupendous successes against the small forces at first sent against them that it was deemed necessary to form a real force to go after them; and the men who had failed had queer tales to tell of tactics in play on the Adansi side which pointed to a master mind trained in a military or naval school of one of the great nations. The rumor decided Doc.

He wanted to be with the force that eventually solved this mystery of the Adansi leader. Hence the steamer lost a good surgeon, and the W. A. A. F.'s gained an enigma.

That force suffered as the first one had suffered, and returned to base sadder, not much wiser, and decimated by fever, field casualties and runaways among the more superstitious of the native troops; for their experiences had sufficiently bordered on the ghostly to instil into their woolly heads the fear that their early training had been more truthful than the later teaching of the white man after all: that there were, the white man's Bible to the contrary notwithstanding, Devils and Ju-jus, Fetishes with real power, and men who died and returned in the flesh to lead those who believed in them, and to destroy with ticks, flies, maggots and rotting of the bowels all who forsook them in life to follow the lure of clothes and hats and coffins for the feet.

The next expedition was formed on lines making for success at any cost, and volunteer irregulars were attached to the regular forces. Doc Ross was busy unpacking his medicine kit at the first bivouac beside the Prah River, when a volunteer saluted with clumsy precision and stood grinning at him.

"Kin I 'elp, Doctor Ross?" the man asked. Doc recognized that quartermaster who had last seen Belfort on the night he quit the ship.

"Hoot, mon! and whut are ye doin' hereabouts?" Doc returned in surprize. "Why are ye no wi' yer ship?"

"Volunteered f'r active service, sir. The ship ain't wot she used to be when Captain Belfort wos in 'er, sir. I'd like to be yer batman, doctor. 'Ow abart it? I ain't used to soldier ways, but I'd be all kushy alonga you, sir."

Doc had had a native soldier assigned to him as a servant, and already had experienced something of what he might expect when the real business of the march began.

A score of men in the camp writhed in torments of itch, for the doctor's boy had issued croton oil to them instead of the regular specific for mosquito bites, and mosquito bites are sufficiently unpleasant on a hot night in the jungle without the addition of a violent irritant.

"Vairy well," said Doc. "I'll have ye detailed to the medical branch o' the sair-vice. Do ye drink?"

"Thenks, sir," the man grinned anticipatively. Doc poured out a draft of quinin

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tonic. It looked like whisky, and the man swallowed most of it before he realized what is was. He drained the tumbler, pulled his features straight with a great effort, and rinsed out the glass.

"Thenks, sir," he said quietly, and saluted, then marched back to his own part of the camp.

"Yon's likely to turrn oot a guid mon!" chuckled Doc, as he rolled up in his mosquito net. "He has the vairy necessary quality of a sense o' humor."

But humor was not Doc's own outstanding characteristic as the march proceeded.

IT WAS a godsend to him when Rumble, the ex-quartermaster, appeared and offered himself for his servant. Doc still retained his grim, kindly ferocity toward men who came to him for treatment; and they preferred his type of ferocity to the smoother incapabilities of other field surgeons they had campaigned with.

But Doc's most secret thoughts were ever set upon Belfort and his disappearance. He had written to that home address taken from the letters, telling the trustful parents that their son had left his ship and gone up country upon a mission of great secrecy and, doubtless, importance, so suddenly that he had asked Doc to write telling them, since he was unable to do so himself.

"An' God forgie me for lyin'!" Doc had breathed as he sealed that letter. Now, with every mile the force traveled, came rumors which later grew into plain statements of fact, brought in by advance guards, captured rebels, fleeing traders, panicky natives, of the terrible being who led the Adansis to such complete triumphs.

Doc's face was haggard and gray, but his keen eyes had lost none of their glitter, when the column halted one sweltering noon to await the report of scouts sent out during the forenoon. The Prah River ran sluggishly, and straight as a canal for a mile from the halting place, through a flat plain covered with buffalo grass.

At the end of the flat straight, there rose a jungle-clad cliff, through which the stream meandered in the crazy convolutions of a locoed snake. Drinking-water stank, and flies laid eggs in the sores left by mosquitoes on the bodies of the cursing soldiers.

"Bli' me!" gasped Rumble, sweating in streams. "I don't care a bleedin' ha'porth wot sort o' ruddy ghost is leadin' the niggers, if only the Old Man sez the word that takes us out o' this stinkin' 'ole!"

In mid-afternoon a scout came in, then another, and another. All bore signs of feverish haste, and one man was prostrated with rank fear. The reports, reduced to coherence, told of a big village five miles up in the crook of a half-mile elbow bend of the river, containing an army of natives camped in what amounted to an impregnable position.

"Making Ju-ju, the fellows say," remarked a young lieutenant delightedly. "Jove! I hope we capture the bally camp before the gory blighters destroy the witch-doctor stuff. What a rippin' souvenir to take home—the wishbone of a baby, or a necklace of dried fingers!"

Doc listened with stony face. He had seen the commanding officer organize a body of volunteers who had come from the sea, and the gang were busily constructing half a dozen light floats on the river, while the gun detachment made stays and blocks with which to steady their pieces on the rafts.

The coming attack would be no mere demonstration, but an attack to be maintained to a finish.

"Rumble, ye'll mak' yersel' ready to come wi' me," Doc said, when the first raft was afloat, manned, and loaded with one field-gun fixed in position, with two cases of ammunition.

The force that was to make a land advance when the six rafted guns had started was striking camp, and, as an earnest of the determination of the C. O. to carry things to a finish, all impedimenta, even to spare ammunition, was left. Each man carried his belt full, his emergency ration and full water flask, and his bayoneted rifle.

"And if the blighters will stand, we'll try the strength of their witch medicine, by Jove!" announced the C. O., as he led the way into the forest.

Doc and his batman kept in the van of the advance.

"Ye'll need me up yon," he told the C. O. when it was hinted that he might do good work among the stragglers. "Any one o' yer young medicos can stay behind and care for funk or that tired feelin', but ye'll need a mon when ye see them bluidy braid spears a-flashin' oot th' jungle at ye."

So they marched until the outflung

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scouts reported the village within touch. To emphasize the statement, and as if purposely designed by an uncannily keen brain to throw dismay into the attacking force, on the heels of the scout came a shower of flashing assegais which crumpled up the front ranks as if a blast of infernal wind had struck them, and a peal of fiendish yells out of the dark depths of the forest.

Yet, a madly courageous charge, led by the youngster who craved a necklace of dried fingers, resulted in the discovery of nothing human, and only the death of the impetuous leader, who was brought in with his brains drilled out cleanly by a high-power small caliber rifle bullet.

Doc stayed until he saw that the column was steady under this initial disaster, then he called Rumble.

"Ye'll travel light, Rumble. Shed all yer dunnage except yer arms and a double whack o' amuneetion. Ye'll follow me across the neck o' yon river bend, and we'll see whut we'll see, d'ye ken? Are ye scairt?"

"'Oo, me? Not much I ain't!" growled Rumble in disdain. "I ain't scared o' much, anyhow, sir; and the man as licked Cap'n Belfort's good enough for me to swing in with. I'm wi' yer. Go hon."

Doc swallowed the inclination to retort, and at the first opportunity slipped away into the forest and plunged on ahead of the scouts.

Rumble kept at his heels, and in fifteen minutes the pair had left behind them all sound of the troops, and had nothing ahead of them, apparently, but impenetrable undergrowth.

THE troops had started out to follow a line nearer the river, keeping thereby in close touch with the rafted guns, and also, while lengthening the route somewhat, making faster progress in the less dense thicket. Doc struck straight across the neck of land within the river bend, and instinct guided him.

Very soon his keen eyes spied a twig set in the earth, festooned with chicken feathers and smeared with blood. A few yards farther on other similar twigs appeared, and now he saw that they formed a definite avenue. His time on the Coast had not been wasted. He knew those twigs were the outward and visible signs of the presence quite near of a big witch-doctor.

Cautioning Rumble, Doc crept forward, keeping to one side of the path, until the forest opened out ahead into a wide grassy glade, in which sat a small village, and beyond which the river ran in a sluggish, yellow flood out of a vast marshy plain to disappear between the frowning jaws of a cleft hill.

"Bli' me, sir! Wot's that buzzin'?" gasped his man, standing as if stricken to stone, his head inclined forward, his usually wooden face awork with excitement. The forest glade seemed to be filled with a tremendous note: it could be called nothing else: and a low, circular hut in the middle of the village was the source of it, apparently.

"Yon buzzin' is likely to come fra the same beastie as carries a sting," replied Doc, quietly parting the last fringe of jungle and cautiously peering through. Not a human being was to be seen in the village; except for the vibrating hum coming from the hut the silence would have been ghastly. But Doc guessed at the reason, and attuned his ears to the limit of their powers.

The sound was soon recognized as the hum of a multitude of men. At moments it swelled to a shriek, and again sank to a sobbing murmur; and like a prelude, before each swelling crescendo, a single voice could be heard raised in a passionate harangue—the voice of a white man, with the accent of a white man speaking the negro tongue, lashing human brutes to frenzy.

From somewhere back in the jungle a cry pealed out, and scattering shots. As if muted under a vast extinguisher the hum ceased in the big hut, the single voice screamed orders, and out poured the congregation at the instant that a score of runners appeared from the forest paths shouting warnings and brandishing spears and guns. Back still further bugles shrilled, and beyond the hill, from riverwards, a field gun boomed in answer.

The swarming natives sent up a devilish yell of defiance, and at the urging of that lone voice still issuing from the center hut the entire army darted into the thick jungle and vanished so swiftly that Doc and his man were all but surprized before they reached the shelter of the branches of a giant baobab.

"Mon, but that was near!" panted Doc, peering down through the dense foliage and watching the last of the blacks running past. "Stay where ye are now, until ye see the

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floats on yon river, or the troops begin drivin' the benighted heathen back. I'll tak' a look yon."

Before Rumble had a chance to reply, Doc had dropped to earth, and was running swiftly across the glade. As he ran, he took his revolver from the holster, and transferred a handful of cartridges from his belt to his loose pocket. Then he reached the building, and, with every nerve tingling in anticipation of what he would find within, was abruptly halted by the outrush of a body-guard of six gigantic blacks, painted and feathered to the point of fiendish hideousness.

But Doc Ross had entered upon this expedition from motives born of the fear that Robbie Belfort and the mysterious leader of the rebel blacks might well prove to be identical, and the fear had become conviction since hearing that terrible voice within the hut, urging the rebels to fury.

No six men, black or any color, could stay him at the point of entry.

With a cold curse on his lips that took the place of a prayer, Doc shot down the foremost guard, fired again, and advanced shooting, while from within the lone voice shrieked demands for news, and from the baobab came the yell of Rumble as he dropped from his tree, ignoring orders, and started on the dead run to his officer's assistance.

Seizing a spear dropped by his first assailant, Doc fought doggedly, parrying thrusts with his spear, and shooting as he got a clear aim in the dim entrance. Back by the river he heard the cheers of the landing gunners, and nearer, the shouts of the fighting forces who were at grips with the blacks.

Rumble's lusty yell reached him at the moment when, stepping forward as he fired the last cartridge in his pistol, and seeing small chance to reload, he came abruptly before the high platform in the middle of the circular house and saw upon it that which turned his heart cold.

"LORD help ye!" he panted, and braced himself to fight more furiously against the attacking guards. Stabbing and parrying with the spear he had snatched up, Doc fought stubbornly to reach that evil Thing on the platform, and opening the breech of his revolver with a thumb, he slipped the weapon into his pocket, the pocket holding the loose cartridges, and loaded the cylinder with blind fingers.

Far out across the village square the forest rang with the sounds of conflict. Nearer at hand Rumble's shrill Cockney oaths poured damnation upon the benighted souls of the blacks who suddenly materialized out of the gloomy jungle to cut him off from his doctor.

And on the platform the Thing chuckled horribly. At intervals it sent out a piercing note not to be likened to anything human, and invariably at the sound of it the savage cries of the blacks fighting in the forest redoubled.

As Doc fought, sorely sapped as to strength by a score of cruel spear wounds, he strove ever to reach the platform, and when he tottered, and all but fell under the terrific attack of the two remaining guards, to his ears came the low, wicked, maniacal voice which was unmistakably the voice of Belfort:

"Join us, white man! Come back to Mother Nature! We are the chosen people, and the men of clothes and trade shall replenish our altars, their women——"

Rumble had been brought to a stop. He could see Doc stubbornly battling against a host of foes to reach that gibbering Thing in the great hut, and behind him the troops surged forward with a shout. The rafted guns began to vomit iron and flame.

"Hold on, sir! Back out!" yelled Rumble. "The lads 'll get 'im in a jiffy now!"

Doc might have heard; probably he did not. His pistol again contained but one cartridge; his foes gave him no time to reload, and into the four entrances to the great hut poured retreating blacks to defend their chief.

A shell whined over the ridge-pole and exploded with a crash in a tree just beyond. The huzzas of winning troops came closer, and Rumble shrieked jubilant encouragement to the master he could no longer see.

Doc let his pistol swing from the sling, grabbed his spear in both hands and plunged forward again, sobbing with weakness, terrible with purpose, and literally hurled himself at last upon the platform where a low, devilish chuckle greeted him.

Through the red mist that gathered before his eyes Doc gazed upon his friend—upon a creature from which all human semblance had vanished, a Thing slobbering bestially, filthy with unnamable vices and utterly

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dead as to soul. Doc hurled his spear into the breast of a black giant reaching up for him, then gripped his revolver and lurched to Belfort's side.

"Lord help me, Robbie," he muttered. "An' ye'll forgi'e me, puir manny, for I canna let them tak' ye back where men'll know ye!"

His pistol cracked and Belfort's brains splashed the great center pole of the hut as a shell ripped the roof off and a last desperate charge of the attacking forces carried the entrances.

"Bli' me!" Rumble exclaimed to his shipmates when the little war was over, and he returned to his true work, "I'll never forgit old Doc! I never see a bloke like 'im. I seen a part o' the scrap he 'ad wiv Cap'n Belfort, and I'd 'a' put a bit o' brass on the Doc winnin' in the end, for 'e didn't seem to care a farden for wot the Old Man wos a-givin' 'im, and that wos a-plenty, my word! But Belfort must ha' put it on 'im rough while I wos fetchin' the mate, and Doc didn't forgit it, neither.

"You orter a seen 'im tear through them niggers! I thought he wos tryin' to git the chief alive and cop the credit. But not 'im! 'E gets in there, all on 'is lonesome, an' blows the bleedin' 'ead orf o' the big chief, as I 'eard some orficers sayin' they s'spected might turn out to be Belfort, wot 'ad disappeared months ago and who wos known to have 'ad a likin' fer the black fellers.

"O' course, that give me my idea about Doc gettin' even for that beatin'; but he wos fooled arter all, for I seen 'im examinin' the chap 'e'd shot, and you couldn't see who it wos arter his shot in the 'ead, but it wos a fat, flabby elephunt of a chap, as much like Belfort as I'm like Wenus.

"So Doc wos fooled proper. Funny bloke, though. Never seen another like 'im. Takes me wiv a couple o' sapper's shovels, he do, and we digs a grave for the fat chief, and 'e sticks up a blessed board at the 'ead and takes a photo of it!

"'Onner to a fallen enemy, Rumble!' 'e sez, and, blast me, if 'e wosn't a-pipin' 'is heye!"

AT BASE hospital, as soon as his wounds healed sufficiently to permit the exertion, Doc enclosed a little kodak picture in a short letter which ran in part:

I have lost a friend, but you have lost a son. It will not lessen your bereavement, but it may soften it, to know that Robbie died in action and the world is better for his sacrifice. I send you a picture, taken by a brother officer, and you will see that your son was well thought of——

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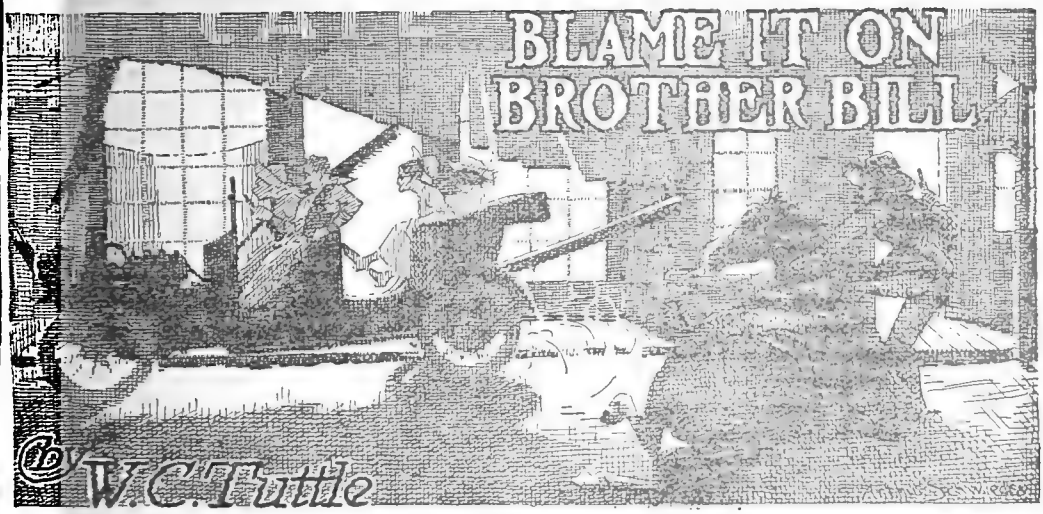

Author of "Between Pike's Peak and a Pickle," "Local Color in Loco Land," etc.

"JAY BIRD" WHITTAKER sang love's sweet song to a female lady one day. The lady seemed receptive enough to matrimony, and Jay Bird spent one whole afternoon on the church steps, packing about forty dollars' worth of pansies in his arms.

But the bride cometh not, and thereby hangeth Jay Bird's perpetual peeve against all things pertaining to calico. Jay Bird shies around women like a coyote around a steel-trap, and spends a lot of time feeling sorry for married folks.

Jay Bird owns the Cross-J cow-ranch and half the banks in the county, and is a trustee of the Paradise school. They elect him to said trusteeship because, not having any kids, he can act impartial, like a deaf, dumb and blind referee in a prize-ring.

Jay Bird never gets mad in spots. Nope, When he gets mad—m-a-d—he's mad all over. His eye gets red, his mustache sticks out like the whiskers of a old bob-cat, and he hops up and down like the earth was too hot to stand on; but at no stage of madness does he lose control of his vocal cords. He can swear for five minutes and never say the same thing twice.

He hires four of us punchers to uphold the honor of the Cross-J and do a little work once in a while. He rises up on every pay-day, hands us our forty-dollar insult, and proclaims to the world that there ain't a one of us worth a tinker's ——.

"Ornamental!" he wails. "Costs me a hundred and sixty a month for knicknacks! Sell out pretty soon. Go into sheep. Danged ornamental cowboys. Catalogs full of better ornaments. Yah!"

Well, maybe he's right—in some ways—at that. I'd be a ornament to any old cow-ranch. I look like a regular cowboy, and I can play a banjo good enough to make folks think I can read music.

"Muley" Bowles has poetical tendencies.

"Telescope" Tolliver, the longest one of us, who came from where they shoot 'em from the laurel thickets, says that poetin' is worse than a floatin' kidney—you can anchor the kidney.

"Chuck" Warner told the truth once. Back in 1888 he told a feller the truth. Of course Chuck was kidding, but when he found out that he had told the truth he rode seventy miles to correct his statement.

Chuck can wiggle his ears like a mule, and make you think the moon was made of green cheese. He ain't got no accomplishments, but he can make you think he has—any kind you want to mention.

Muley and Jay Bird was arguing the difference between being killed with a .45-70 rifle, or a .45 six-gun when Chuck rides in and hands Jay Bird a couple of letters. Naturally we sets there around him; which fusses Jay Bird considerable.

"Now," says he, "I wonder who in thunder wrote to me? I ain't wrote to nobody. Gol dang it, I wonder who wrote to me?"

"They might give the snap away inside,"

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suggests Telescope. "Some folks ain't got no more sense than to sign their name."

"Myah!" snorts Jay Bird. "Smart as ——, ain't you?"

He opens one of the letters and squints at the contents. He spells for a while and then begins to masticate like he was chawing round steak what hadn't been pounded. Pretty soon he spits audible-like.

"Any of you buckaroos know what a see-na-reo is?"

"Sure," says Chuck. "That's a he in Spanish. *Señorita* is a female."

"Yeah?" The old man pe-ruses the letter again.

"What else is in it?" asks Muley.

"She says—" the old man fusses with the paper—"she says, 'I have been very successful with society see-na-reos, but the wild, free life of the boundless plain has called to me; its matchless beauty, its dashing cowboy heroes, its——'"

"Keno!" yelps Chuck. "I *sabe* what she is now. A see-na-reo is something that them moving-picture folks use. Who is this female who is pining for a dashing cowboy hero? Lead me to her, old-timer."

"Like ——!"

The old man hops up and down and exudes profanity by the quart.

"Have her here? Gol dingle danged if I will. No dog-gone see-na-reo female is going to darken my door. By the horns on a Holstein heifer, my ranch ain't no hangout for any female what hankers for cowboy heroes. Heroes? Heroes ——! This is a cow-ranch."

The old man breathes hard and sets down with us again.

"RELATION," says he. "Can't help that, can I? I ain't to blame for being related to folks by marriage, am I? One thing about friends—you pick 'em yourself. Dang Bill!"

"Relation?" asks Telescope soft-like.

"Uh-huh. Related to my brother Bill's wife. Dang Bill! Like a fool I saved his life the day before he got married. Wish it was today. Name's Clementine."

"Who, Bill?" asked Muley.

"No, no. Her wife. I mean her husband —No!"

The old man hops to his feet and spits like a bob-cat.

"No, you blasted, long-complected wampus. Bill's wife's name is Clementine. *Sabe?* Her—name—is—Clementine!"

"Well," says Chuck sad-like, "don't try to fasten the crime on to us."

"And she wants to come here," murmurs Muley. "Out here——

"Where the cowlets gambol o'er the hills,
Where dashing cowboys stray,
And wear hair-pants and roll their pills,
And pray for next pay-day.
Where coyotes thrive and rattlers hiss,
Where —— is nothing to shun.
Male or female who hankers for this
Is a locoed son-of-a-gun."

"Muley," says Jay Bird, "that's real poetry. It has rime and reason. I'm going to give you a raise some of these nice days."

"When?" asks Muley.

"When Wick Smith pays back that dynamite he borrowed last Spring."

"Going to answer that letter?" asks Chuck.

"Answer? You dang well know I am. I'm going to write her a screed that will change her whole future. When she gets through reading what I'm going to write her she'll be sorry she ever wrote to me. *Sabe?*"

"Uh-huh," nods Telescope. "She sure will. I've tried to read your writing, and I know."

"Know anything about her?" asks Muley.

"Know she's got more money than brains," nods Jay Bird.

"How much more?" asks Chuck.

"Lot more—dang it! Worth a cold million, I reckon. There's two of them."

"Two millions?" asks Chuck scared-like.

"No, you danged chump. Two women. Her chum wants to come too. Letter says that her father is a financier. Wants to come for a holiday."

"And you're going to send 'em home," says Telescope, sad-like.

"No!"

Jay Bird digs his feet into the dirt, and slaps his hips like a big bird getting ready to fly. "No! Gol dang it, I ain't even going to let 'em start. Uncle Bill says that you will be pleased to have us spend a few weeks at your rancho. The —— he will! Yah! Rancho! Must think this is a Mexican settlement. I'm going to enjoy Bill's funeral some of these days."

"Maybe he'll outlive you," suggests Telescope. "Nobody knows."

"Don't, eh? Say they don't? I can beat Bill on the draw, can't I? Don't talk

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about things you don't know nothing about, Telescope. Dang Bill!"

Then the four ornaments went down to the corral and lined up on the top pole of the fence.

"This here old world is dreary enough without folks chasing away what little sunshine there is," opines Telescope, "especially when the sunshine has a golden lining."

"No woman worth a million would ever fall for a forty-a-month puncher," says Muley sad-like. "She can pick and choose, can't she?"

"Some can and some can't," states Chuck. "I knowed one once that——"

"Don't lie, Chuckie," reproves Muley. "You never knowed a woman that had over a dollar and six bits at one time. You dream things, *hombre*."

"Love is a wonderful thing," states Telescope. "Women make the world go round."

"Uh-huh," nods Muley. "And they make you wash your ears and make you quit playing poker."

"You and Jay Bird had about the same experience, Muley," grins Chuck.

"Yeah—only different. Mine was some woman, if you asks me. She was educated, believe me."

"Yes, and she was smart along with her education," nods Telescope. "She showed it when she passed you up, Muley."

Muley was sitting straddle of the fence, leaning against a post, so he lifted one foot, placed same in Telescope's stummick and shoved him off.

Just then Jay Bird comes loping down to the corral, waving a letter at us.

"Hey, Chuck! Sling a hull on your bronc and take this letter to town for me, will you? Want to get her off today."

"Come on down with me, Hen," says Chuck to me. "I don't want to ride alone."

"Fraid he'll lie to himself, Henry," grins Muley, "and he believes his own lies."

Me and Chuck gets half-way to town before he hauls out that letter. It is addressed to Miss Marie Castleton, Helena, Montana.

"Some name," applauds Chuck. "Betcha she's a bird, Henry Peck."

"I'd tell a man, Chuck. And we'll never see her."

"The —— we won't? Think she'll ever get this letter? You're crazy!"

"What do you aim to do?" I inquires.

"Telegraph, Henry. Get her here before Jay Bird can stop her. *Sabe?*"

When we got to Paradise Chuck sent this wire—

Come ahead and bring your pardner,

and signed it with the old man's name.

Then we went down to Mike Pelly's and played pool for a hour or so, and just as we're getting on our broncs here comes the depot agent.

"Telegram for Whittaker," says he, and hands it to us. After we gets out of sight we opens her up. She reads—

Arrive there tomorrow morning,

and is signed "Marie Castleton."

We finds Telescope and Muley in the bunk-house, and we shows them the telegram.

"Better give it to the old man," advises Muley. "It's for him."

"And have him wire her to go back? Not much!"

"And may the best man win," pronounces Telescope. "I hereby declares open season on any man I finds wearing any of my pink shirts or Sunday ties. *Sabe?* I'm tired of having you *hombres* get gaudy at my expense."

"All right, cowboy," says Muley. "Just lay off my razor and talcum powder."

"And give me back them yaller boots of mine," adds Chuck.

"They hurt your feet, don't they?" asks Telescope.

"Not now they don't. Hen, you take that polky-dot handkerchief away from him and he'll be danged near nude."

WHEN it comes to clothes the Cross-J outfit are there. Any old time we opines to dog a little we can sure squeak around like dudes. We sees Jay Bird ride toward town, and about dark here comes Magpie Simpkins, leading the old man's bronc.

"Dumped, drunk or a poker party?" asks Chuck.

"Went to Great Falls," says Magpie. "Feller wants to buy some cows."

"Dang him, he suspicioned things," yelps Chuck. "Quitter!"

"For which?" asks Magpie, twisting his mustache.

"Scared of females," explains Chuck. "Two ladies, both worth a million dollars, will arrive here in the morning. One of 'em is related to Jay Bird's brother Bill, and now

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the old man sluffs his responsibility like this. He's a fine relative!"

"Poor little darlin's, almost broke,
Strangers in sage brush land.
No one to greet 'em—it's no joke
To pine for a welcomin' hand.
Relative's gone to sell a cow;
Outlook is dark and drear.
No one to guide 'em—cool their brow
Or give them a proper steer,"

recites Muley weepy-like.

"Maybe he knowed what he was up against," grins Magpie. "I've got relatives that I'd——"

"Never seen her in his life," interrupts Chuck. "She's a dinger, Magpie. Say, he's got a picture of her on his wall. Come on, I'll show you."

We all went into the house, and Chuck pointed out the picture. Magpie got enthused right away, and I can see that Muley and Telescope ain't missing none of that pretty face.

She sure looked mighty good. Maybe I ain't no lady's man, and maybe I don't cut my cinch every time I see a pretty face, but I sure do *sabe* females what are easy to look at. I cut that picture out of a magazine myself. The epitaph said it was Lillian Russell, but I cut that off.

"And Jay Bird runs away from that?" grunts Magpie. "Million, too, eh? Jay Bird ought to be sent to a loco-lodge. Wish I was him."

"Betcha the other one is a dinger, too," says Muley.

"Beyond the shadder of a doubt," nods Magpie. "Wish I was Jay Bird."

"Go ahead, Magpie," says Chuck serious-like. "The lady has got to have a uncle, ain't she? It ain't reasonable to suppose that any uncle would rather sell a cow than to meet the likes of her, is it? Of course, Magpie, a uncle ain't going to fall in love with his niece. You've got to play according to Hoyle."

"Oh, I ain't got no matrimonial motives," says Magpie. "I'm willing to be a willing little helper, that's all. I'm betting that as uncle I'll be closer related to her than any of you snake-hunters ever will be. Bet you even money. Who can cover a twenty at that price?"

"Whirl the wheel, Mr. Simpkins," says Telescope. "I calls that bet."

"Anybody else want to wager a bean or two?" asks Magpie. "Here is a easy-betting proposition, Henry. Want to get your feet wet?"

I didn't. Love to me is like a Yaller Rock jury—no betting proposition. Jury sets in the case of Hassayampa Harris *versus* Doughgod Smith. Hassayampa is suing Doughgod for three hundred dollars, borrowed money. Doughgod admits it to be a couple of hundred, but Hassayampa says three. Jury brings in a verdict giving Doughgod two hundred dollars damages.

The judge gets woolly and asks the jury if they knowed what the case was about. He orates that Hassayampa is suing Doughgod—not Doughgod suing Hassayampa. Slim Hawkins, the foreman, says:

"We *sabe* the thing, judge, but we decided that any man who can borrow a cent from Hassayampa Harris is entitled to a consideration, the same of which we adjudicates to be worth an extra two hundred."

Magpie hives up with us that night, and the next morning we all heads for Paradise. Magpie hitches the team to the buckboard to bring the ladies home in, and we got to Paradise about train-time. We finds Hassayampa Harris at the depot, and he gazes upon our raiment.

"Say, you fellers missed a day, ain't you?" he asks. "You fellers sure are acting reckless, wearing Sunday clothes on Saturday. Why dude up thataway?"

"Hang around," advises Chuck. "Something coming on the train."

"Better get lanterns," says he. "Freight wreck below Silver Bend, and the passenger won't be in before dark."

Then we all filed back to Mike's place. Seems like most of the leading lights of Yaller Rock County are in Paradise. Being Saturday the most of the folks comes in to see the bright lights and do a little trading. We runs into "Cobalt" Williams and "Slim" Hawkins, and then we all joins forces with "Ricky" Henderson, "Frenchy" Burgoyne, Bill Thatcher and "Mighty" Jones. It was a mighty pleasant day.

As soon as Chuck imbibes what would make about two inches in a washtub he gets to orating. Of course Chuck's oration spills the beans, and it ain't no time until Paradise knows that Jay Bird's wealthy niece and another gold-laden female is coming into our midst. Chuck tells 'em that the girls hankers to gaze upon some dashing

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cowboy heroes, such as is told about in song and story—by liars who ain't never been further West than the stockyards of Chicago.

Then Bill Thatcher pounds upon the bar. Bill has gazed upon wine when it is red.

"Feller citizens," says he, "I wish to be listened to upon the matter which confronts us like a sheep in wolves' clothing. Paradise is about to be honored. Does Paradise appreciate it? No-o-o-o-o!"

Bill leans on the bar and cries bitter tears. Ricky Henderson gets weepy, and then Slim Hawkins boo-hoos like a kid.

"Ba-a-a-a-aw!" wails Bill. "Pup-paradise don't appre-shiate things. Noshir. Here is two inoffensive ladies coming to shee her, and she ain't doing a danged thing."

"Tha's right," admits Ricky. "What's th' use of anything?"

"Nothing whatever," says Cobalt sad-like. "Let's get reshep-shun committee. What shay? Silver cornet band and shpeeches. Whoo-e-e-e!"

THAT suggestion hit the crowd dead center. Paradise has a band. There's a drum, a slip-horn, a cornet and a flute. Cobalt plays the drum, Ricky plays the cornet and Slim plays the slip-horn. The flute ain't found no master yet, so anybody plays it—if they can.

She's some band—I think. They ain't never practised together, being as they never are in town at the same time. When Cobalt comes to town he goes over to the vacant shack where they keep the music utensils, and he proceeds to hammer —— out of that drum for a hour or so. When Slim happens to town he goes over, puts some axle-grease on the slip-horn and blows himself limp.

Ricky has more time to practise, being as he lives in town. He's only been shot at twice, which is a good record for a cornet-player.

But today the band is increased by two. Frenchy can play the squeeze-organ, and Bill Thatcher inherited a ear for music from his dad, along with a bull-fiddle.

We're having a vocal vote on who will make the welcoming speech when in comes old Judge Steele from Piperock. We inoculates the old pelican against snake-bite, and then explains the gravity of the situation to him. He listens and applauds us for our public spirit.

"There ain't a scintilla of evidence that I can't do it well," says he. "I can do it legally and lawfully, and there won't be a dry eye in the audience. I sure have one silv'ry tongue, and I appreciates the honor you wishes upon me. But it is no more than I deserve."

"As the horse-thief said on the gallows," states Magpie.

"We'll show um th' Wesht as she is," says Bill. "Wild and woolly and full of fleas, and never curried below the knee. Muley, you figure out a poem to reshite, and we'll show um a good time."

"I thank you for the honors you beshtows upon me," says Muley. "I deserve every bit of it. We all do—danged if we don't."

"We'll likely get all that's coming to us," grins Chuck.

After a while we went over and got them music utensils. Hassayampa pulls his gun and orates that he's the best fluter ever whelped, and when a man thinks like that there's only one thing to do—give him a flute. Frenchy got a squeeze organ that leaked wind and whined like it had hay fever. Bill didn't have his bull-fiddle, but Mike loaned him a violin, which only had two strings, and Bill said it was fine. He never used but one string anyway.

Maybe I didn't have as much "Never-Mind-What-Happens" in my skin as the rest, and again maybe my idea of music was different, but I hated that band right off the reel. If they was playing for sawmills they wouldn't even get splinters in their fingers.

I think Hassayampa was the most pleasing of any. He blew into the hole on the end of the flute instead of across the hole on the top, the same of which didn't rack my nerves, and he got as much applause as the rest.

To see Slim playing that slip-horn reminded me of a man with gas on his stummick, sawing fence-rails with a dull saw. Every once in a while he forces it to emit a blat like a sick calf. Ricky runs the gamut of cornet afflictions, but he knows that nobody is going to kill him—not under the present conditions.

Cobalt gives that drum one awful walloping, and Bill squeaks loud and free on one string, while Frenchy cramps his whole system trying to urge enough wind into that squeeze-organ to make a note. We applauded 'em plentiful—when they desisted.

"Don't you reckon we done well?" asks Slim.

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"Well," says Magpie, "you didn't get killed—which is wonderful. What in—— was you fellers playing?"

"Classical composition, Magpie," says Ricky. "The Tor-e-a-dore. That's what they plays at Spanish Bull-fights."

"——!" snorts Magpie. "I thought they killed the bull by hand."

Then we all went back to Mike's place to organize for the future. Old Judge Steele sure has some hy-iu ideas.

"Pe-rade," says he. "Pe-rades is the thing, and a asset of civilization. After the pe-rade we will have a banquet. *Sabe?* We ain't in no shape to hand out a regular banquet, but 'Baldy' Benson opines that he can fry ham and eggs enough at four bits per plate—pie extra. Now I'm asking you all to subscribe to the ham and eggs—pie extra—so we'll be able to give Baldy a hunch on how much to fry."

Everybody parts with a four-bit piece, and then the judge orates some more.

"Feller citizens, I wishes to argue pe-rades. Art Miller has a automobile. Art towed her in here last night behind his stage. She ain't no beautiful dream, but she's gas power, and Art says she'll run. Art ain't here tonight, but we all know he'd be willing.

"The guests which are about to invade our midst are likely used to the best, and we'll give it to them to the best of our ability. Now I asks you this: Is there anybody within reach of my voice that feels competent to swing this here vehicle up to the depot and back to the banquet board at Baldy's?"

"I'm competent," says Magpie. "I know 'em from the gasoline tank to the cemetery. Lead me to the gas go-devil, and may I have an open path to glory. Amen."

Art has got the machine in his barn. She ain't much to gaze upon, but we all crowds in and looks her over. Magpie fusses around a while, and then he begins to wind her up. Frenchy and Bill gets curious to see what he's doing, and all to once the blamed thing snorts, yanks ahead and pins all three of them jaspers to the wall.

About a dozen of us hauls her back and lets 'em loose. Bill and Frenchy want to lick Magpie, but he explains that there ain't no brake on it and they lets him off.

We hauls her out of the barn, and everybody gets hold of the back end. Magpie winds her up, hops into the seat and yells for everybody to let loose. I hops in with him, and everybody let loose—all except Judge Steele, whose coat-tails caught in something, and we hauled him half-way to the depot, howling like a Comanche.

Magpie circled the depot, looking for a place to land, and lost me on the second crossing of the track. Then he shoved the end of it into the platform, and she stopped like a bronc with both feet in a hole. Then comes the band, with the judge limping along behind.

Magpie is some engineer. We hauled that machine away from the platform, and pointed her nose toward Baldy's. Then Magpie got a inch rope and tied it from the rear axle to a post.

"Now," says Magpie, "as soon as we gets the guests into the machine I want somebody to cut the rope. *Sabe?* We'll let the engine run."

Then we all lines up there in the dark and listens to the train. As soon as she drifts into town Cobalt takes a wallop at the drum, and they're off in a bunch. We never heard the train at all.

IT WAS darker than ever after the headlight got past us. The depot agent was a new man, and he didn't take no chances with lights. The conductor hopped off the train with a lantern on his arm, and some danged fool among us cut off his twinkle with a bullet.

He went back into that car like a gopher going home, and we hears him yelling at us. We had one awful time making that band quit so we can hear what he's got to say.

"Ladies coming off!" he yelps. "Don't shoot!"

Two females drops off the platform, and the train departs. Somebody yelled at us from the back platform, and I seen Telescope bust the little corner lantern with a bullet.

Them two females stands there in the dark scared-like, and then old Judge Steele steps out of the main herd.

"Ladies and gents," says he, "I have been lawfully chosen by the esteemed population of this glorious city of Paradise, a city lying like a gem in the midst of the bounding plains, where the sun rises like a jewel and sets like a—a—ahem! Where the sun rises in the evening and sets like a—a—a——

"Dearly beloved, I have been apportioned to hand you the keys of the ja—ah—city,

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and to assure you, my dear ladies, that you are not too good for anything we—ah—the people of Paradise, a city, lying like a—a—a——"

"No doubt about it, judge," admits Magpie. "She lies in spite of anything. Anybody got anything more to say?"

"Me," says Muley. "Here she goes:

"Dear ladies fair from other lands,
We welcomes you to Paradise.
If you comes heeled or empty hands,
That doesn't cut a bit of ice.
We love you four ways from the jack.
We won't dodge Cupid's darts
If you should happen to go back
You'll leave a lot of busted hearts."

Boom! Boom! goes that danged drum, and that bunch of melody-murderers starts in where they left off. Magpie grabs one lady and I grabs the other. We gets 'em into the back seat of the machine, Magpie grabs a lever that makes her howl, and then Hassayampa cut the rope.

Did we go? You danged well know we did. We bears right down on Mighty Jones, who was going to lead the pe-rade, and cut his bronc right out from under him. There's one tire on the rear and one on the front, the same of which makes that wagon act like it had sore feet.

"Turn down to Baldy's!" I yelled.

Magpie turned the best he could. He swings plumb over the side and yanks hard on the wheel, but that thing felt the reins too late. We hit the sidewalk where it was low, and we stayed right on it. I got a glimpse of Baldy standing in the door of his café, and the next second we took the three props out from under his porch, and then we hit straight for the North Star.

"Going back, ain't you?" I yelps in Magpie's ear.

"Steering-gear won't work," he yelps. "No rudder nor brakes, Henry."

I looked back. The ladies seemed to ignore the seat and are sitting flat down in the bottom. I think one was praying.

Bang! goes a shot, and before I can turn, *bang!* goes another. I yanks my gun and spins lead back up the road.

"Tires blowed!" yelled Magpie. "Wind Ri-i-i-i-i-ver!"

Zow-w-w-w-w-w! That buggy hit the loose gravel of the grade, and we went into that river like a otter.

Wooshl Half the river seemed to hit me in the chest, and then we're out the other side.

"Went some!" I yelps in Magpie's ear.

"Ain't stopped, have we?" he yells sarcastic-like.

It's a mighty good thing that road was straight. Any time she bent a little we cut out the curves. Then we yanked over the last rise and whizzed straight for the Cross-ranch-house.

Here is where Magpie used judgment. The road wasn't cut out no further, so we hit the gate-post with a front wheel, the same of which bent things and took us from the straight and narrow way. Nobody knows how many times we circled that house.

Hop Louey, our cook, came out to see the merry-go-round on about the tenth lap, and just then we hits a grindstone, which bends us a little more, and we chased that Chink right into his own kitchen door. It is sure hard to tell where he might have pilgrimed if that door had been big enough to let us through. We did well at that, and when I begins to understand things again I'm kneeling behind the stove, hanging on to the stove-pipe with both hands.

Magpie has a broom in his hands and is sweeping around, sort of dazed-like. A oil lamp on the table illuminates the scene fine. One of the ladies is standing against the wall with her hat down over her face, and the other, a fat sort of person, is setting on the front end of that wrecked machine, making funny motions with her hands.

Magpie sweeps around to the one against the wall, and when she won't get out of his road he gets so sore that his mind clears.

"My ——!" he grunts and lays the broom down.

He watches her lift the hat off her face, and then he holds out both hands to her.

"Kiss your uncle," says he hoarse-like.

The lady backs against the wall and looks wild-like at Magpie.

The fat one slides off the wreck and stares around the room. Then she staggers over to the one against the wall, and says—

"Fear not, Agnes—I am with you."

"Same here," says Magpie. "Body and soul, ma'am."

"Where are we?" asks the thin one foolish-like.

"Right here," says I. "Right here in the kitchen."

The skinny one looks like a cross between

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a vinegar taste and a Pilgrim sister, and the trip she's just taken wasn't no fountain of youth, I'd tell everybody. She sort of shudders.

"Fear not," says Fatty, looking mean-like at Magpie.

"I ain't scared—I'm shocked," states Magpie.

"Shocked? You ought to be in jail," hisses Fatty.

"Yes'm, I reckon," admits Magpie. "But you'd hate to see your uncle in jail, wouldn't you?"

"Uncle? Well, well!"

"Uh-huh. Didn't you recognize me?"

"No, I—I——"

"That's sure all right, ma'am," says Magpie. "You're excusable."

Them two ladies shakes their heads and looks at us. I reckon they've both aged some since they landed in Paradise.

"By golly!" says I. "We missed the ham and eggs, Magpie."

"Did we?" asks Fatty wondering-like. "I thought we hit everything."

Magpie fingers his mustache and feels of the bump over his eye. He ain't no beautiful person to look upon when he's intact, but with a bump over one eye and the top part of his shirt missing—well, he ain't no heroic-looking *hombre*. He opens the door to the settin'-room and bows low.

"Ladies, there is your bood-wah. If I can do anything——"

"No," says Fatty. "You've done a lot," and they shut the door.

ME AND Magpie sets down on the table and stares at each other.

"Henry," says he, "is the name of that photygrapher on that picture of her?"

"I reckon. Why, Magpie?"

"I'm going to kill him some day, Henry. No man can lie like that and live long. Million per each, eh? Well, they say that every woman has some kind of charms. Did you get hurt any?"

"Me? I don't know yet. I've got several precincts to hear from yet before I know whether I'm glad I came or a cripple for life. Let's go down to the bunk-house and get some liniment."

"Sensible thought, Henry. What do you reckon Art Miller will say when he sees the wreck?"

"You fellers won't live to care," snaps Muley's voice, and here comes him and Telescope and Chuck climbing over the top of the car.

Muley has got a gun in his hand and murder in his eye.

"You danged kidnapers," wails Telescope. "You done us dirt."

"All of Paradise is sore at you two," states Chuck. "Nice way to treat 'em after they puts themselves out thataway, ain't it? You sure got in bad. *Sabe?*"

"We'd 'a' likely got in worse if the door had been wider," says Magpie.

"Where's the ladies?" demands Muley belligerent-like. "Don't lie, Hen!"

I points at the closed door. Muley looks at the busted machine. On the floor is the hat which belongs to the skinny one.

"My ——!" he wails. "If you've hurt a hair of their heads——"

He yanks the door open and sticks his head inside.

Bam! Muley lands setting down in the kitchen and around him falls the remnants of the old man's blue water-pitcher. Muley looks up at us, and between his eyes seems to rise a purple goose-egg.

"How did you find 'em?" asks Magpie.

"Well—" Muley hitches further away from the door and rubs his head—"well, I find that you and your danged automobile didn't break all their arms."

"Say, can you hear me?" yelps a woman's voice from inside.

"Each and every word, ma'am," says Telescope. "Go ahead."

"I just wanted to say that I've found a gun in here. A word to the wise is sufficient, I hope."

"Ma'am," says Chuck, "you get your hope. Is there anything we can do?"

"You might try," says she, "but you won't get far with it."

We all looks at each other and nods. Muley caresses his eyes.

"I know how she got her million," says he. "She bluffed somebody out of it. The old man ain't got a gun in the house."

"Oh, yes he has," says Telescope. "He's got that old double-barreled muzzle-loader shotgun in there, Muley."

"Yes, he has," agrees Chuck, "but it ain't been shot for years."

"That makes no never mind," orates Telescope. "The old man loaded it with rock salt to shoot a Mexican with, but the Mex got wise and never showed up again. Ever get salt under your hide?"

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Then four dashing cowboys and a bunco uncle hitched up their belts and sneaked out of there on their toes, and we never hit a heel until we shut the bunk-house door behind us.

"How did Paradise feel about it?" I asks.

"Mighty Jones sprained his wrist," states Chuck, "and Baldy Benson is peeved over his porch. When we left there the band was serenading the jail, and Judge Steele was still there at the depot, trying to remember how the sun sets in Paradise."

"I—I wonder if they recognized me as the person who recited the poem at the depot?" wonders Muley.

"I don't think so," says Magpie. "'Cause why? Well, they'd 'a' used the gun on you instead of the pitcher, Muley."

"Does she look like the picture, Magpie?" asks Telescope.

"Well—" Magpie twists his mustache and considers the question—"well, I don't like to make a statement about that, but I'll say this much, Telescope: She looks as much like the picture as the picture does like her."

"Near enough," admits Chuck, and Magpie nods, "to the truth—yes."

"Wish I could get out of the cow business," says Telescope. "Feller never amounts to nothing in this business, and believe me, I'll get out the first chance I get."

"Opportunity knocks at your door," says I.

"How?"

"Walk up to the house and open the door. That rock salt is petrified by this time."

Then we went to bed. We ain't got to sleep yet when we hears a wagon roll into the yard. We hears voices, and then the wagon goes away.

"Some of that danged Paradise bunch follered us up here," grunts Telescope.

We speculates for a while, and all to once comes a whopper of a explosion.

"Mamma mine!" whoops Chuck. "That muzzle-loader! Served 'em danged well right for monkeying around. Good for the girls!"

Chuck crawled out and barred the door.

"Make 'em believe we're all asleep or dead. We ain't got no room in here anyway."

Pretty soon there comes a knock, and then somebody tries to get in. We don't make a sound, and after they rattles the door a few times they goes away, cussing profoundly.

THE NEXT morning we puts on our Sunday clothes. Muley can't resist taking a peek at the house, and when he opens the door in comes Sing Louey. That chink has a poker face, but right now he shows e-motion.

"Breakfast ready?" asks Muley.

Sing shakes his head and points to a bump over his eyebrow.

"*No sabe!* Too much no can do. Whasamalla?"

"What happened?" asked Telescope.

"Las ni'—" Sing rubs his head sad-like—"somebody try killum me. No *sabe.* Smashum door. You *sabe?* 'Mobile buggy. I sleep in barn las' ni'.

"Bymebye I go to kitchen. Makeum bleakfast—you *sabe?* Lattle pan, sing China song. Bossie likum egg cook two minute. Me no clock. Me go in to get clock in bedloom. No *sabe!*"

"Did you get the clock, Sing?"asks Magpie.

Sing nods and rubs the lump.

"Too much quick. No catchum. Where lady come flom?"

"Jay Bird sent for her," says Magpie. "You *sabe* niece?"

"She stay?"

"Maybe."

"Where boss?"

"Gone to Great Falls."

"Smart man," nods Sing. "Me go 'way, too."

"Great Falls?" asks Chuck.

"Go plenty fa'. Maybe Flisco. Goo'-by."

And we stands there and sees our hopes for breakfast going off down the road toward Paradise.

"Well, what do you think about that?" wonders Muley.

"I think," says Magpie wise-like, "I think we abducted a catapult."

"Look who's here," grunts Muley, and we sees Ricky Henderson ride up.

Ricky sure can dog up like a plush horse, and we can smell the perfume before he stops his bronc. He ain't in the habit of visiting us.

"Just riding around," says he. "How's things?"

"We don't know yet," says Magpie. "We're scared to ask 'em."

"Mornin', cowboys," yells a voice outside, and Bill Thatcher slides off his bronc. Bill is sure dressed up like a blue-ribbon

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pup. He's got on one of them dickey shirt-fronts and no vest, the same of which makes him keep his coat buttoned and both hands busy to keep it inside.

"Been getting drunk or married, Bill?" asks Telescope.

"Bill's got weak lungs," grins Chuck. "He's protecting 'em."

"Aw-w-w-w-w!" grunts Bill. "You snake-hunters don't *sabe* style. This is the latest thing out. *Sabe?*"

And he puts her back inside again.

"How did you come out with the automobile, Magpie?"

"Didn't. Reckon it will require a carpenter, Bill. Howdy, Cobalt."

"Greetings," says Cobalt, and adds his presence to our group. "Just run over to see Whittaker, and—looks like a roundup here. All you bright and early punchers."

"You knowed Jay Bird wasn't home, didn't you?" asks Muley.

"I don't believe all I hear, Muley."

"A-a-a-a-ny bod-e-e-e-e-e home?" yells a voice, and here comes Slim.

He's wearing a sombrero that makes him look like one of them coconut palms you see in pictures. He's got on a green-silk shirt with a red handkerchief around his neck and is wearing a pair of yaller boots. He's got us all faded when it comes to being gaudy.

"Going to town and thought I'd stop in," he explains foolish-like.

"Might as well," admits Muley. "Only seven miles out of your road."

"Why does everybody lie?" complains Telescope. "Looking at you I'd opine it was a *fiesta* day at the Cross-J. Ain't there enough females to go around without you cutting in our latest shipment?"

Nobody says a word, and then Magpie adds:

"Gold-hunters, Telescope. If them girls didn't have money you couldn't lead one of them *hombres* to this ranch."

"You're wrong," states Bill. "Money be danged is my motter."

"Same here," says Ricky. "I can support any wife of mine—y'betcha."

"Who's got money?" asks Cobalt. "What you talking about, Magpie?"

"Has them girls got any money?" asks Slim. "I never heard about it."

"Well," says Chuck, "it was a lie anyway."

"Say it was?" asks Slim. "What would Jay Bird lie for? He ought to know something about his own relations, hadn't he?"

"Thought you never heard anything about it, Slim," states Magpie.

"Aw-w-w-w, I just heard—that's all; but I'm like this: I don't believe much what I hear."

"You cow-trailers make me tired," grunted Chuck, getting up and starting for the door.

"Where you going?" asked Telescope.

"Paradise. There ain't no sense in everybody trying to visit with two girls at the same time at the same place, is there? If a feller had a horse and buggy he'd——

"But there's only two decent driving-horses in Sam Holt's stable."

"Ho hum-m-m-m-m!"

Bill stands up and stretches his arms. "Reckon I'll drift on, folks."

"Same here," announces Ricky, and Cobalt gets up, too. "Got to see a feller about noon today."

"I'll mosey along too, I reckon," proclaims Slim, and we watches them four dude punchers swing on to their broncs.

Did they ride away friendly-like? They did not. Slim spurred his bronc over a five-foot wire fence and had two hundred yards start. Ricky and Bill jammed into each other at the gate, which gave Cobalt second place from the barrier, and we stood there and watched 'em fight it out through the dust—four souls with but a single thought.

"Ain't you going to compete, Chuck?" asks Magpie.

"Nope. Sam Holt sold the last buggy-horse he owned to Bill McFee, and right now the livery-stable is null and void."

"By cripes, I'm hungry" wails Muley. "Don't we never eat again?"

"Did you ever get shot with rock salt?" asks Telescope.

"YAH!" snorts a voice behind us, and we turns to look into the face of Jay Bird Whittaker.

He's got loose hay hanging all over him, and he's feeling deep into his hip pockets with both hands.

"Yah!" he snorts again, masticating rapid-like.

"Yah?" says Telescope agreeable-like. "You here?"

"No," he snaps. "Won't be back for a week! Who's in my house?"

"The see-na-reo-ess," says Chuck, wiggling his ears.

"Bill's niece?"

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Jay Bird goes off the ground with both feet.

"Gol dingle dang it! Takes after Bill. Yesterday she does—dang his hide! Shoot first and ask questions afterwards. Shot me in the middle of the night. Danged if she didn't! When did she come?"

"Last night," says Magpie. "Thought you was in Great Falls."

"Yah! Seventeen box cars tore up the tracks, so the trains can't run but one way. You fellers met 'em yet?"

"Muley got a knockdown to one of them, and Magpie and Hen brought 'em home in a automobile," says Telescope.

"Automobile, eh? Treated 'em right, eh? Yah! And then they shoots their relative in the middle of the night! All alike—dang 'em! Come on. When I get through talking to 'em they'll wish— Salted me! Right in the pants!

"Hate women. Won't have 'em here. *Sabe?* Won't even have a woman cook. Keep my chink, believe me! Chink don't fall in love with nothing but his hop-pipe. Women, ——! Come on."

"They crowned Sing with a clock, and he left," states Muley sad-like.

Jay Bird lets this soak in a minute, and then heads for the house with us trailing close. The front door is open. One of them females is standing by the little table fixing the lamp, and the other stands up as we come in.

"Came anyway, eh?" snorts Jay Bird. "Just like a woman. No sense. Going to kill Bill some of these days. Didn't wait for my letter, eh? Well, why don't you say or do something?"

"Think I ought to kiss you?" asks the fat one sarcastic-like.

"Kiss me! Gol dingle dang it, you've got nerve! Just like Bill."

"I don't know what to say," says the thin one timid-like. "We met a lot of lunatics at the depot who put us in an automobile and tried to kill us. One of them said he—he was our uncle, and then that fat one there tried to come into our room when we was going to bed."

"And then somebody else tried to break in here afterwards," says Fatty.

"I know," says Jay Bird.

"I—I found this gun and shot through the window, but don't think I hit him."

"Don't bet!" snaps Jay Bird. "Don't bet! Gol dang it, I don't want you here. Won't have you here either, believe me. Won't have no gol-danged see-na-reo-esses around my ranch. *Sabe?*"

"No what?" asks Fatty.

"See-na-reo-ess!" howls the old man.

Blam! I'll hand it to Fatty when it comes to heaving things. She had her hand on that oil lamp, and when the old man repeats that name, she hauls off and plants the lamp right on his brow.

The old man goes backward over a chair and comes up with the wick in his teeth.

"Don't you offer me no insults," squeaks Fatty. "You think just because we're helpless women——"

The old man spits the wick out and wipes the oil out of his eyes.

"You're no uncle of mine!" she yelps, "Nor you either!" she yelps at Magpie.

"Ma'am," says Magpie, "I bows to superior wisdom."

"You have anything more to say?" she asks.

"More ——!" snorts Jay Bird. "Sorry I spoke. Dang Bill!"

"Dang Bill all you want to, but you can't insult me."

"You know your limitations, ma'am," says Jay Bird soft-like; and just then cometh "Old Testament" Tilton. He smiles at us collectively.

"Brothers and sisters, I give you the good word," says he.

"I'll take it," says Jay Bird, and the old devil-dumper rubs his hands together happy-like.

"I ain't heard a word," says he, "but any time I sees so many punchers dressed up and all heading the same way I gets a hunch. Who is the lucky man?"

"I am," says Jay Bird. "I am—dang it! That gun might 'a' been loaded with buckshot."

Then the pe-rade begins to arrive. Slim comes in a buckboard, driving a pair of Seven-A broncs, and right behind him comes Cobalt with his saddle horse hitched to a breaking-cart. Ricky and Bill seem to have gone into pardnership with a two-seated hack.

They sort of lazys into the place offhanded-like, and stands around.

"Howdy, Jay Bird," says Cobalt. "How's everything?"

"Don't know!" he snaps. "Ain't a puncher—don't know everything."

"Any of you gentlemen claim relationship with us?" asks Fatty.

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"Ma'am," says Bill, bowing low, "you know your own heart. I'm free, white and twenty-one."

"Me too," says Cobalt. "I ain't got much, but I'm a honest, hard worker."

"Tell the truth, Cobalt," advises Bill. "It's true that you ain't got much, but why add the honesty and hard work?"

"Say!" explodes Jay Bird. "What you fellers trying to do? Make love to my niece before you know her? Love! All right. All right. Just as soon marry Bill's niece to a good-for-nothing puncher as not. Be a good joke on Bill —— dang his hide! I'll introduce you. Line up, dang you, and get used to a couple of millions."

The ladies stand there like a pair of foolhens.

"Now, girls—" Jay Bird looks the crowd over— "there ain't a lot of choice among 'em. Take a look and let your judgment be your guide.

"Slim Hawkins is the first one. Slim, meet the ladies. Cobalt, you're the next victim. Girls, this is Cobalt Williams."

"T' meetcha," says Cobalt foolish-like.

"Yah!" snorts Jay Bird. "Next is Bill Thatcher, girls. Bill ain't much to look at —except his loose shirt-front. Bill—the ladies."

"Paralyzed," bows Bill. "Perfectly."

"Now Ricky——"

"Just a short pause," says Ricky. "You ain't pronounced the names of the ladies yet, Jay Bird. I admire to know who I'm meeting."

"——! They're taking chances—not you!" snorts Telescope.

Jay Bird rustles through his pockets and hauls out a letter.

"Danged if I don't disremember the names myself," he grins. "Bill's relatives' names don't mean much to me."

HE PEERS into the letter.

"Which one of you is my niece?" They both stare at him.

"Is he a relative of yours, Agnes?" asks Fatty, and the skinny one shakes her head.

"Not on my mother's or father's side.

"Bill sent you, didn't he?" asks Jay Bird.

"Never heard of him," says Fatty. "Live in Helena?"

"No! Dang it, no! In Spokane."

"As far as that's concerned, nobody sent us," states Agnes. "We got your telegram, and you said——"

"Here it is," says Fatty, handing it to Jay Bird.

"Marie Castleton?" says he wondering-like. "Why, I—I wrote you——"

He turns just in time to see me and Chuck going out. I seen him reach for that danged shotgun, and I sure hopped high and handsome. There ain't a danged saddle-horse in sight, so we picks Cobalt's bronc and breaking-cart. It looks faster than the rest.

Chuck cut the tie-rope, and that bronc whirled away from there like a flash. The animal might 'a' been bridle-wise, but not wise to a driving-bridle, 'cause no horse what ever pulled a vehicle to any extent will go so far as to try and jump fences with one.

We cuts a circle away from there, and that fool bronc jumped the fence around the hay yard. The long shafts in the cart acts like a teeter-totter over the top pole, and when that bronc comes down on the other side me and Chuck sure got a bird's-eye view of Jay Bird Whittaker's possessions.

I seem to be about to the top of my flight when something seems to sting my system considerable and just as I hit the top of the haystack I hears the roar of that blasted muzzle-loader. Somebody had let me have the other barrel. I lit sitting down, and I sure skidded off that hay and pointed toward Paradise.

It took me about fifteen seconds to catch up with Chuck, and right behind us comes that team and hack that Ricky and Bill brought up. They're running away, but they ain't got nothing on me and Chuck.

We yelps and waves our hats and managed to turn 'em into a patch of mesquite, which slowed 'em up enough to let us hook on to the rear end. We crawls over the bumping end-gate and lays down to breathe.

"Danged old wing-shot!" yelps Chuck. "You got off lucky, Henry."

"The —— you say! Notice I'm not sitting down, don't you?"

The seats have bumped off the vehicle, and the going is so rough that we can't stand up, so we lays there and waits for what is yet to come.

"Must be about to Wind River," yells Chuck. "We've been going for a long time."

And just then we hit something that stands us on our heads against the front end

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of the hack. I grabs hold of Chuck, and when I hits the ground he's on my lap, and right in front of us is Jay Bird Whittaker.

Our hack had hit the corner of the bunkhouse. I gets a glimpse of two bucking broncs about half out of harness buck-jumping up the slope beyond the house, and as I peer around a tire comes down and rings a fence-post. That team had cut a circle with us and we didn't know it.

Jay Bird squints down at us, and sort of grins. Chuck fusses in his inside vest pocket and hauls out a crumpled letter.

He hands it to Jay Bird, who stares at it and then opens it up. He squints at the contents and hands it down to us. It reads:

DEAR MADAM:

Got your letter today regarding you and your teacher friend. We are going to hire a man teacher for this term. We ain't got a big enough school for two teachers, and no woman could learn these darned tough kids anything.

Yours resp'y,
J. B. WHITTAKER,
Trustee of the Paradise School.

Chuck peers up at the house and scratches his chin.

"You—you also wrote to your relative, didn't you, Jay Bird?"

"I did not!" snorts Jay Bird. "Letters are too slow. I sent a telegram—gol dang you! I didn't trust nobody with that but old man Whittaker. *Sabe?*"

Chuck nods and squints at the house again.

"All gone," nods Jay Bird. "Follered the runaway. Girls went with Old Testament."

"School-teacher, eh?" wonders Chuck, wiggling his ears. "Can't use 'em, eh? Too bad. You don't know a real teacher, old-timer."

"Don't, eh? Say I don't? Going to hire Marie—danged if I ain't! She sure can hammer wisdom into kids, believe me."

"Or into adults," says I. "She sure can."

"Yeap," says Chuck. "She's there four ways from the jack. She sure is competent to teach the young idea how to shoot."

"Shoot?"

Jay Bird flinches away from his pants and squints down at us.

"Chuck, you told the first truth I ever heard from you. Danged if she can't—even in a night school."

WAKU

by Frank H. Huston

CONTRARY to general opinion among the whites, the feather worn by the Indian in his hair was not for adornment, nor did each feather signify an enemy killed or captured. It showed his status, that is he had graduated as a warrior, had indeed killed an enemy, made a coup or that he had killed single-handed a grizzly or cougar—no small feat before firearms were known.

Some tribes used one, others two, and occasionally three feathers, one usually being the average. The "Waku" or medicine feather was from the wings of the eagle, the pinion feather being used, and preferable from the bald eagle, valued at from one to three ponies; while those from the road-runner or chaparral cock often brought as many as thirty ponies. Of the latter bird only the tail feathers were used and were estimated as the greatest medicine—somewhat as a piece of the true cross is looked upon by Catholics.

Mounted upon a wooden peg as a hair pin, buckskin wrapped and beaded as to quill, the feather part was painted, giving the number and manner of killings performed by the wearer. Each round dot meant killing by bullet; a short broad stripe, by knife or axe; and a long, narrow stripe, by arrow or lance.

The "Wakuna"—erroneously called war bonnet—was the ceremonial or full dress affair. Eagle plumes were used if possible, and the front held one or more of the road-runners. The breast feathers of the blue bird formed the upper part of the forehead band, this latter being usually of other skin, of itself big medicine, and giving an appearance of beauty.

Wakunas were prized possessions, evidence of prosperity, the tail or hanging part often being so long the end would touch the ground when its wearer was on pony-back, and could hardly be purchased.

The Waku was as the rank insignia and medal is to the military, but the Wakuna, though possessing to a degree the same attributes, was really the "soup and fish" to the substantial citizen.

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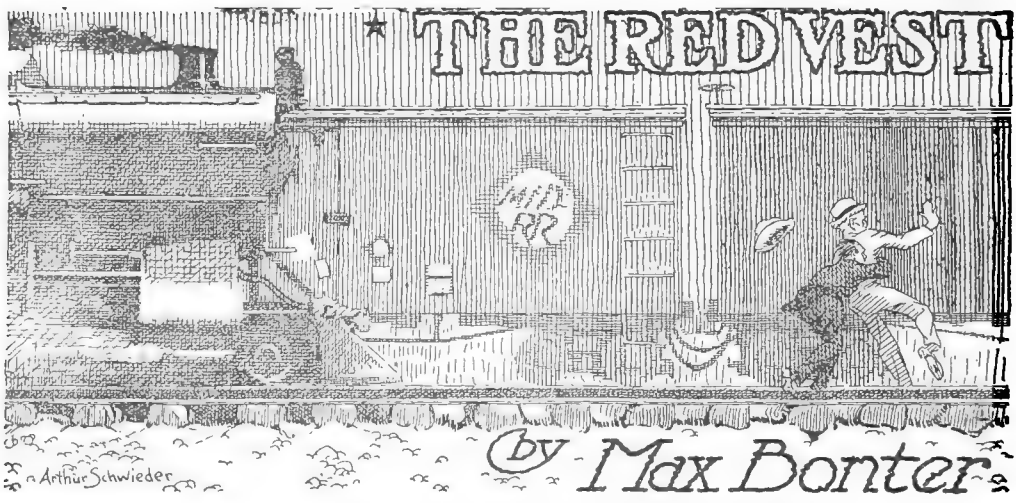

Author of "Everybody Likes a Gun-Man," "The Bullet and the Blast," etc.

"BROADEST of all the avenues to greatness," mused Chief of Detectives McGrann, "is pertinacity."

He delivered himself of this truism between meditative puffs of his cigar when "Red Vest" Sullivan brought Haddon, the notorious embezzler, back from Buenos Aires after a chase extending over a period of two years. The chief permitted his thoughts to wander back to the curious twist of fate that had turned Red Vest's peculiar talents into the channel through which he had finally achieved prominence as one of the most indefatigable of society's watch-dogs.

SEVERAL years ago certain little knots of hoboes congregated about water-tanks and in "jungles" over the country used often to be accosted by a quiet, mild-eyed young fellow dressed in much the same haphazard fashion as themselves—

"Say—any of you guys seen anything of a fellow wearing a red vest?"

Now a gentleman of the road thus conspicuously attired would have been such an anomaly as immediately to have attracted attention; but in the undeniable vastness of the territory lying between Maine and San Francisco lay undisputed possibilities for the unnoticed peregrinations of red-vested individuals; and, accordingly, the replies made to this oft-iterated query were usually in the negative. Nevertheless, in case such a gaudy habiliment perchance had been encountered by one of the accosted company, the circumstance was sufficiently marked for him to be able to narrate just where and when and under what conditions the bright-plumaged hobo had been met with. On many occasions, however, the mild interrogator would receive merely a guffaw in return for his question, and often the gratuitous opinion, tossed after him in none too subdued a tone—

"Say! That guy must be a nut, eh?"

One afternoon in Council Bluffs, Iowa, he made his usual way to the outskirts of the town and entered a well-known jungle there. Half a dozen members of the wandering fraternity were grouped about a fire; one bestowing careful attention upon a slowly concocting mulligan; another brewing a can of java slung from the same tripod, and the others reposing their picturesque persons in a variety of negligent attitudes about the center of attraction. The mild-mannered young man, as was his wont, already had opened his mouth preparatory to voicing the usual query anent the mythical fellow wearing the red vest: but suddenly he shut it again. Silent, he stood surveying the motley group in front of him.

"Say, bo," he was asked by one of those present, "can you contribute anything to this here tea-party?"

"Sure," he readily assented. "I ain't

** This is an Off-the-Trail story. See first contents page.*

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rustled anything, but I got the price of a can of white lion."

"That's what I calls a man," asserted another of the hoboes. "You're sure jake in this jungle. Front an' center on the hooch."

"I'll be back in half an hour. Save me some of that chow, will you?"

"Surest thing you know. Nothin' too good for the guy with the hooch."

The man who was afterward to achieve fame as Red Vest Sullivan repaired to the city of Council Bluffs and procured, in a convenient drug store, a pint of grain alcohol, with which peace offering he returned at once to the powwow about the jungle fire. The mulligan was at last cooked and the java sufficiently hot and muddy for potation.

"Present arms for the hooch!" bawled one of the group facetiously as Sullivan appeared on the scene.

"Who's got another can?" was the anxious inquiry of the next one.

"Put the white lion in the java," suggested a third.

"Now you're shoutin', Jack," acquiesced a fourth of the party, "make it a caffy roil."

"Caffy roil it is," came then the unanimous decision.

Sullivan emptied the bottle of alcohol into the villainous-looking brew, one of the impromptu cooks stirring the mixture about with a stick the while. The can was thereupon passed among the men present, who proceeded to imbibe deeply—all except Sullivan himself, who feigned to drink but forebore taking any of the decoction into his stomach.

The mulligan was next attacked, pieces of plank and rusty tins serving as plates and clasp-knives or sticks of wood doing joint duty as knives and forks. When the eatables and drinkables at last had disappeared the hoboes lighted cigarets and grew mellow and reminiscent.

"How much'll you take for the vest, Jack?" enquired Sullivan lazily of the wanderer sitting beside him.

The gang roared.

" 'Red' must have to take a lot o' kiddin' on account o' that front," hazarded one of the company.

"That's me mascot," declared Red with a grin, opening wide his tattered coat and disclosing to view a waistcoat that exhibited symptoms of having at some time past borne a bright lobster hue, but that now, after years of rough usage, was stained and mottled like the hide of a leopard.

"I swiped it in Newark two years ago," he continued amiably, "an' since that time I've traveled from coast to coast with it. It's sure a dandy ol' chest-warmer—just as warm as it looks."

"Which way you travelin', Red?" asked one of the hoboes.

"I'm headed back for Newark—she's a good ol' burg."

"I'm goin' to Newark myself," confided Sullivan, looking meditatively at the end of his cigaret.

"Well, bo, you kin travel with me if you want to," remarked Red generously, mellow with the white lion and perhaps hopeful that more was to be had from the same source. The other members of the party asserted that they were bound west. All loafed about the jungle until nightfall and then departed in several directions, Red and Sullivan heading toward a convenient water-plug where they could catch an eastbound freight train.

THE tramp called Red—not alone on account of his ruddiness and carroty hair, but also on account of the color of the vest that he wore—was big and burly. Plenty of latent power was suggested by the lithe movements of his heavy limbs. Sullivan was wary of Red, but nevertheless discovered that he was a good partner on the road. His moral standard was not high, but the sincerity of his palship was beyond question. This fact Red demonstrated at various times when rustling grub was ill-attended with success by sharing crumb for crumb with Sullivan his meager pickings.

"It's me red mascot, bo," asserted Red with superstitious positiveness when his partner complained of the lack of success that attended some of his own foraging expeditions.

"Let me wear it for a day and see if it'll change my luck," begged Sullivan.

"Nothin' doin'," replied Red shortly.

"If I could wear that vest for an hour or two I could rustle some change, I am sure," persisted the other.

"Why, how d'you know that?" demanded Red suspiciously.

"Red's my lucky color, too," answered Sullivan lamely.

"I takes that vest off only when I takes me annule bath," declared Red with an air of absolute finality.

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Resignedly his partner forebore to press the point.

The two men worked their way eastward to Chicago. From the metropolis of the Middle West they journeyed by easy stages to Toledo, Cleveland and finally Buffalo. There, when descending at the limit of the Seneca yard from the freight train on which they had been riding, an incident occurred that cemented the friendship of the two men more firmly than anything that had transpired before.

A swiftly moving express train, its low thunder inaudible above the grinding of the heavy freight, was speeding to Buffalo on the next track. The two hoboes, having just completed their descent from the freight train, were standing at the time on the narrow strip of ballast that lay between the two tracks. Red saw the danger in time to have leaped clear of the express, but his partner's back was turned toward the danger, of which he was undoubtedly oblivious.

Red's crude intelligence worked with lightning-like rapidity. Realizing that nothing that he could possibly shout or signal to Sullivan could be heeded by the latter in time to save himself, the big tramp bounded forward, seized his partner in an embrace of iron, threw him quickly to the ground in the narrow space between the two tracks and held him there until the roaring peril had flashed by.

"Kind o' a close shave, pal," admitted Red as they rose to their feet. "You had your lamps turned the wrong way, buddy. It 'ud 'a' got you sure if I hadn't jumped on you. Hurt you any? All right—let's get out and hit the pike. This yard's got a nashunal reppytashun for bad bulls."

Sullivan, strangely silent, accompanied Red out to the Shore Road and together they rambled into Buffalo. Thereafter on the way East he seemed on several occasions on the point of imparting something to his fellow wanderer; so much so that Red once felt himself impelled to enquire solicitously:

"What's on your mind, buddy? Ain't you feelin' good? We'll be back in the ol' town in a coupla days now."

"I'll tell you something when we get to Newark, Red. I think I can make a touch for us that'll put us on our feet."

"Thought you might 'a' had good people," assented his partner. "You ain't much o' a bo, are you?"

Two days later at midnight the two men swung clear of a freight train pulling into the Newark, New Jersey, yards, and likewise landed almost in the arms of two railroad detectives standing with drawn revolvers awaiting them.

"What you guys want?" grumbled Red, throwing up his hands. "We ain't done nothin'. We just come in from the West."

"Can't help that, bo. Too many freight cars busted open lately in this yard. You'll have to tell your little tale to His Honor tomorrow morning. We've got orders to pick everybody up."

The detectives manacled their prisoners and turned them over to the city authorities. Any opportunity that Red and Sullivan might have sought to confer with each other over their plight was precluded by their being placed in separate cells. In the morning in the court room, before their cases were called, Sullivan took occasion to whisper to his friend:

"Red, did you ever frisk that vest—the lining, I mean?"

"Why, no. What you tryin' to give me? You goin' batty, pal?"

Sullivan heaved a sigh of relief.

"I was going to tell you, Red——"

"Hey! Stop that, you fellows!" commanded the officer in charge of them.

"Thomas Sullivan and James Donnolly," droned the voice of the magistrate, "charged with unlawful train-riding and trespass upon railroad property. How do you plead—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, your Honor," responded Sullivan.

"Guilty," echoed Red surlily.

Ten dollars and costs was the finding in each of their cases, with the alternative of ten days in jail.

"I believe that I can pay the fine, your Honor, if my partner will let me have my vest," said Sullivan, looking meaningly at Red.

The judge stared.

"Do you imply, young man, that this prisoner Donnolly is wearing your vest?"

"Yes, your Honor, that's the situation."

Red's eyes opened wide. He looked from Sullivan to the judge.

"It's my vest," he asserted doggedly. "I've had it for over two years."

"Can you explain to the satisfaction of this Court how it comes that the prisoner Donnolly is wearing your vest, which he claims to be his personal property?"

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There were not many cases on the docket. The magistrate, with plenty of time to spare, was evidently affable and in the humor to pursue and enjoy any little eccentricities that might intrude themselves into the drab procedure. The police court reporters pricked up their ears, scenting perhaps a colorful item with which to appease their city editors. Detectives and police officers and spectators began to indulge in anticipatory smiles, remarking the dilapidated aspect of the article of apparel that inspired the contentiousness. Sullivan, meeting a hostile glance from Red, realized that the latter would not willingly comply with his demand, and that it would be necessary to make a clean breast of the affair.

"I used to be a tailor in this town," began Sullivan. "When loud vests was all the rage I made that one for myself. I made it so loud that they could see me a block away. I was a kind of a sport in those days. I made money but I used to blow it. One hot day I was playin' pool in Jimmie Garratt's place on Market Street. I took off the vest and put it over the back of a chair behind me. Quite a lot of hoboes used to hang around there, and when I looked for my vest it was gone.

"After that I didn't seem to have any luck. I got to drinkin' and lost my job and at last I struck the road myself. Everywhere I went I used to ask the guys if anybody'd seen a fellow wearin' a red vest. I didn't get track of it for a long while, and then I heard in Detroit that a hobo wearin' a red vest had started for the Coast. I heard of him again in Chicago and Council Bluffs and Kansas City and El Paso, Texas and Los Angeles and then Frisco. I was close on his trail in Frisco, but he got away from me and went to Seattle. I kept tabs on him by askin' all the hoboes in the jungles and around the water-tanks and in the cheap lodgin'-houses if they'd seen a guy wearin' a red vest. I'd always get a clue, sooner or later. I'd never seen the fellow myself, but the red vest was better than a first-class description. He came back from Seattle and at last I ran into him in Council Bluffs. We came back East together."

The white-haired judge sat up in his chair, took off and polished his glasses, replaced them on his judicial nose and stared from Red to Sullivan in amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded brusquely, "that you followed this man all over the United States on account of a red vest? How do we know it is your vest? Can you prove it? And how you can pay your fine if it is returned to you is extremely problematical, inasmuch as any money you may have left in it two years ago can hardly be there still."

"As to its bein' my property, I can easy prove that," declared Sullivan, "If I can have it in my hands for a minute."

"Donnolly, remove your vest," directed the court obligingly.

Sheepishly Red divested himself of his coat and then the once gaudy habiliment that had been his mascot, as he called it, through nearly every State in the Union. Sullivan took the garment and held it up in front of the judge.

"Your Honor," said he, "what looks like the real pockets is only fake ones. Here's the real pockets here."

The ex-tailor lifted the flaps that covered the lower pockets in the waistcoat and with a deft pull he disclosed two apertures that formerly had been completely concealed by cunningly contrived rows of patent fasteners. Diving with impatient fingers into these inner pockets, he pulled forth two neatly folded bank-notes, which he proceeded to open out. They proved to be fifty-dollar bills.

He held them in front of the astonished judge. The reporters scribbled furiously in their note-books. Detectives and spectators craned their necks and peered at the money. Red's eyes grew round and mournful as they surveyed the wealth with which his person had been invested for two long years, during which time he had often been hungry and thirsty and bedless and in such predicament that even a dollar bill would have been much like a boon from heaven to his harassed soul.

A quiet-eyed man in civilian clothes who stood near the magisterial chair, leaned over and whispered to the judge. The dignified old judge nodded.

Sullivan handed one of the bills to his partner.

"Here, Red," said he, "pay your fine and keep the rest of it."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to pay this man's fine after chasing him all over the country to recover your property?" asked the astounded judge.

"He's my partner," said Sullivan. "He's been fifty-fifty with me, and I'll be

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fifty-fifty with him. I meant to tell him about the vest before, but I kept puttin' it off all the time. You can have the vest, too, Red," he continued, handing that article back to the astonished and delighted hobo. "It's your mascot.

"I'd have told you a long time ago, Red, only first off I did not know what kind of a guy you were and I was afraid you'd beat me to it. Then after you got to be a good pal and saved my life in the Buffalo yards I was sort of ashamed to say anything. You know how it is. Anyway, I thought that when we got back to this town I'd get you to come over to Garratt's pool-room and put you through a sort of mild third degree by goin' over to the spot where I hung up the vest and seein' if I couldn't put you wise without bein' rough about it. If the money was still in the vest I sure meant to split with you, old-timer."

Two cameras snapped when the two men left the court-room. At the street door a quiet-faced man tapped Sullivan on the shoulder. The ex-tailor recognized him at once as the gentleman whom he had seen whispering to the judge.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

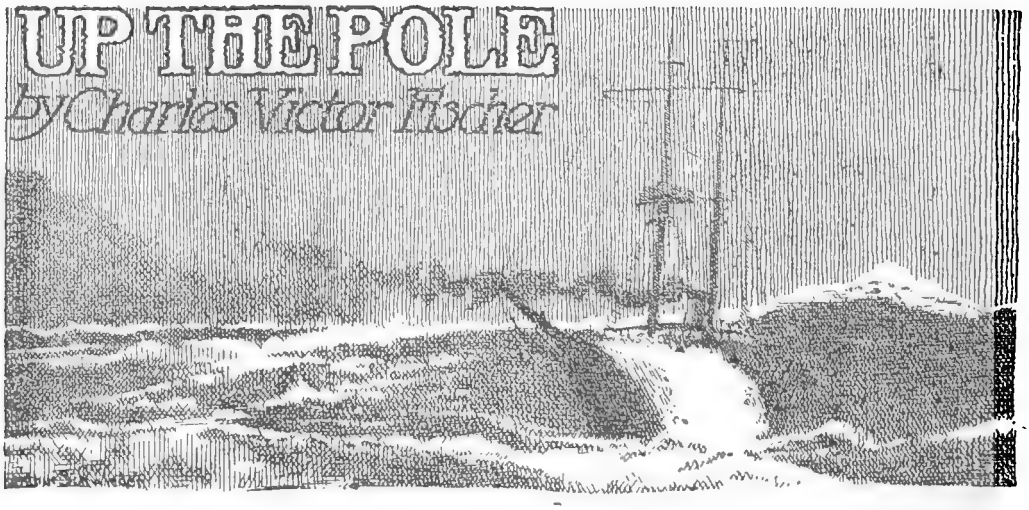
"No, sir," Sullivan replied.

"My name's McGrann. Come and see me at my office."

He wrote a word or two on a plain piece of paper and handed it to Sullivan.

"I can give you a job," he concluded, "chasing something more important than red vests."

THE chief, thinking over these old matters with a smile of pleased reminiscence, threw away the butt of his cigar and went down to congratulate Red Vest Sullivan, who had just brought back Haddon, the notorious embezzler of poor peoples' savings, from his refuge at Buenos Aires, after a chase extending over a period of two years.



THE ANCHOR-CHAIN of the big cruiser *Faralone* clanked slowly through the hawse-pipe. From up forward between the eyes the boatswain called—

"Anchor's aweigh, sir."

"Break your pennant, Mr. Balde," ordered Captain Doone on the bridge. "Let's see if she breaks clear."

From the main gaff, as if by magic, the long blue homeward-bound pennant broke clear and fluttered away in the breeze, trailing down over the stern of the ship. All the blue bunting that could be begged and borrowed was in that pennant.

"Anchor's in sight, sir," called the boatswain a few minutes later.

The propellers began to churn, and the rudder went hard over. The ship's band got busy; blue-jackets on the upper decks

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danced and threw their hats in the air; and wistful eyes from other ships in the harbor watched the *Faralone* steam majestically out of Manila Bay—homeward bound.

Almost to a man, the crew were "short timers;" and San Francisco meant a discharge, and home. The shortest timer on the ship, however, "Blackie," a radio electrician first class, was neither dancing nor throwing up his hat. The compartment he was confined in was too small to permit of any extensive exercise.

Besides, he was too bruised and battered to feel in the mood for hilarious demonstration.

Blackie had returned from shore liberty a few nights before, his feet all tangled and his brain all muddled, from an over-sufficiency of a certain native concoction that tasted mild but kicked hard. The officer of the deck would have connived at the mere fact that he wabbled aboard drunk. Such things are to be expected in the tropics. But——

"'Turned 'board, shir,'" Blackie had hiccoughed.

Ensign Dodley laughed; so did the quartermaster, and likewise the anchor-watch. Blackie's face was all scratched and bleeding, his clothes were torn to tatters, and he was disheveled almost beyond recognition. It was after midnight, so that these three comprised his entire audience.

"Yes, I see you've returned aboard," laughed Ensign Dodley. "Very well. Go forward quietly, and turn in. Remember, no noise!"

But some of those tropical drinks put queer kinks in men's brains.

"Wash idee, no noish?" Blackie growled. "I'm alish quiet! Caush a mansh natchly peashable, like to pick on 'im; zat it? Nur shing, wash sho funny? Can' gemmam shailor 'turn 'board wizout bein' laughed at by a lot a hyeenish, like heesh monkey, 'r shumpin? My 'pinion ish you're bunch laughin' hyeenish. Everybody on ish ship ish laughin' hyena—Captain down."

"Mr. Dodley, put that man under arrest!" The amused trio turned to face Captain Doone, standing there in his pajamas.

"Shay, you ole reprobate—you an' alla laughin' hyeenish you got on ish ship can't put me unner aresh—git me? I kin lick anyshing at walks." With which Blackie made a staggering lunge at Captain Doone.

Ensign Dodley—who had been a halfback at Annapolis—tackled low. Blackie was brought to the deck with a thud. He saw stars—stars and stars—then nothing, till the next afternoon, when he opened his eyes to see a pharmacist's mate bending over him and bathing his cuts and scratches.

A look around showed him that he was in the brig.

A FEW days later Blackie found himself lined up on the quarter-deck, with a dozen or so other misdemeanants. Old Captain Doone—a fatherly old man at all times, except when he was, as at present, holding "Mast"—stood behind the high desk, stroking his gray beard. The executive officer stood at his right, and the executive's yeoman, or ship's writer, at his left. Off to one side stood "Juggie" Clark, the chief master-at-arms, or ship's chief of police.

Gradually the long line of delinquents dwindled, until Blackie alone remained.

"F. H. Blackhurst," said the yeoman, opening out Blackie's enlistment record and laying it before the captain. Blackie stepped up to the desk, saluted and removed his hat.

After glancing over Blackie's past performances a few moments, the captain held up the record.

"Proud of this?"

"No, sir," Blackie replied.

The captain glanced sidewise at the yeoman.

"Read the charges," he said curtly.

The yeoman read—

"'Returning from liberty drunk and incapacitated for duty; using obscene and insulting language to an officer; attempting to bodily assault an officer.'"

Captain Doone looked up at the man facing the desk.

"Anything to say?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Do you realize the gravity of the charges against you?"

"Yes, sir."

The captain grunted.

"I don't believe you do. Yet you've been in the Navy almost eight years. The trouble is, it's too late to realize it now! Why didn't you think of all this before? You knew better——"

"I was drunk, sir," Blackie argued weakly. "I'd known better if I'd been sober."

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"Ah! Right there is the point! You were drunk! Didn't you know that in the Navy of today, it is a court-martial offense to take even one drink of intoxicating liquor?"

"I did. Yes, sir."

"Then you haven't any defensive plea to put up?"

"None, sir."

"General court-martial," said Captain Doone stiffly. Then turning to the chief master-at-arms, "Clark, while we're at sea, let this man run the ship as a prisoner at large, in the daytime; at night, keep him in the brig."

BOOZE troubles were nothing new to Blackie. His enlistment record was all bespattered with red ink, telling of moist escapades. It was for this reason that, after eight years of continuous service, he was still only a first class petty officer. As a radio operator, he was well nigh peerless.

He could work through the heavy, roaring, tropical static as none of them could—and there is no region in the world where these atmospheric discharges are harder to receive through than around the Philippine Islands.

When it got so bad that every other operator aboard threw up both hands, Blackie would take the 'phones, and sit down and copy. But for all of his proficiency as an operator, his advance had been slow. For two years he had been first class. And this despite that every officer on the ship was "pulling" for him. Time and again they had been about to put him up for chief; but always Blackie would suddenly cut loose on one of his wild sessions, overstay his leave, or get into a rough-house brawl ashore and get arrested—do something to put more red ink on an already badly red-inked record.

Yet, as many times as he had been on report, he had always managed to squirm out without getting in very deep.

"He can get away with murder" they would say, every time lackie became officially entangled. But not so now. For this time he had stepped on the toes of the Omnipotent.

"He's good for two years in 'Eighty-four,'" they were foreboding. ("Eighty-four" being a Naval prison at Mare Island, California, where, so former inmates allege, an exceedingly high temperature is maintained.)

"Sure is a shame," said Frisky Malone one afternoon as he, Shorty Scott, the radio Chief, and Blackie hung over the rail.

"I'll say it is," affirmed Shorty. Then, turning on Blackie— "What gets me is the way you keep on doing it right over again! You know what it does to you. John Barleycorn has handed you more knock-downs than you could shake a stick at! Why didn't you wait till you got to Frisco and got paid off? You knew we'd be homeward bound in a few days."

"Say, haul down the crape," Blackie laughed. "They haven't hung me yet."

"Got anything up your sleeve?" Shorty queried.

"Nothing but common sense," Blackie replied. "That tells me that a lot of things can happen between here and Frisco."

"Well, I sure hope you squeeze out, old-timer."

So did almost every one on board hope so. Probably every one but old Captain Doone, whose dignity had been sorely touched by being called an old reprobate, and the skipper of a crew of laughing hyenas. Yet even he had always liked Blackie.

Blackie had a reckless dash and go about him, commingled with those elements of fairness and uprightness, that got him friends, and made him a leading man among his honest-minded, fun-loving shipmates. He was a straight shooter. He looked right straight at a man out of a pair of almost coal-black eyes.

As if to counterbalance the alcoholic kink in his brain, nature had been good to him in other ways. He was magnificently framed, muscled, and thewed; of handsome features, and a congenial mode of bearing and expression; a lover of sociability; a good mixer.

The *Faralone* had started on the second and longest leg of her voyage—from Guam to Honolulu. Far astern, the little island of Guam was receding toward the horizon. It was sunset time; but the sun went down unseen, behind dark ominous clouds. Ahead, the sky merged from dark gray into almost black. The sea, hitherto as smooth as a mill-pond, had become choppy, under the head wind that had sprung up. On the forecastle men lounged about smoking, swapping yarns, or gazing away into the fast-gathering darkness.

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"All right, Blackie," said Juggie Clark, "time to go down to your coop."

"Aw, have a heart," Blackie protested. "What's the rush?"

"Orders to lock you up at sundown every evening, old-timer." Juggie yawned. "All right," he then consented, "you can stay up another half hour. Say, do you know what that sky ahead looks like?"

"Uh huh. I've seen 'em before," Blackie replied. "There's all the ear-marks of a typhoon."

"Oh boy, oh boy!" chirped a noisy quartermaster. "Never is the barometer fallin'! We're headin' into somethin' that's gonna make the chronic seasickers feed the fishes."

And by nine o'clock they were heading into it. It came with such sweeping suddenness that it made their heads swim! The head wind quickened into a stiff breeze; in twenty minutes it had become a gale; and before they had time to secure loose gear, men were groping wildly and staggering drunkenly about decks, as the big ship bit into the roaring hurricane!

The big vessel pitched as if she were a thing of cork. Up out of the water her ponderous bow would rise, as she mounted to the crest of each mountain-like wave, up and still up, until men hung on with bated breath, tense and wondering; then down she would drop, down and down, until her falling bow buried itself in the wave beyond, shipping hundreds of tons of thunderous, swirling, phosphorescent water with each dip, and trembling violently under each pounding impact.

Out on the starboard wing of the bridge, Captain Doone and Commander Balde, hanging on to the rail, viewed the situation with grave faces. So deafening was the howling of the wind that they had to yell at each other to be heard.

"I think, Mr. Balde," the captain shouted, "that we'd better put about and return to Guam. We'll not be able to enter the harbor; but we can lay in the lee of the island, till this sweeps over. Better that than trying to weather it, with the probable result of losing a boat or two, and Lord only knows what not."

"Oh, captain!" Shorty Scott stumbled out on the wing of the bridge.

"Yes?"—leaning over and looking into Shorty's face. "Oh, Scott eh? What's up now?"

"An SOS call, sir!" Shorty reported excitedly. "Can't copy her. Weak signals, and static's roaring!"

"Call Guam!" yelled the captain. "Tell them her wave-length. They've got a high aerial. Let them get her position and give it to you."

"I did that a half hour ago, sir. They can't copy her either. She's either a long ways off, or got a very weak outfit. Only comes in in spots. I made out SOS; but couldn't get her call letters nor position. She's still sending."

"Can't you get anything of what she is sending?"

"Only a letter or a numeral now and then, sir."

"Then why in —— do you come up here and add to my worries?" the old man exploded. "A distress call! You can't get her; neither can Guam! What do you expect me to do? Order the Immensities to turn off the static?"

"No, sir," Shorty yelled back; "but the best static man in this part of the world is down in the brig! If any man can copy that ship's position——"

"Tell the master-at-arms to release him! Bear a hand!"

BLACKIE reeled into the radio room. Without a word Shorty handed him the 'phones. For a few minutes he varied and adjusted on the receiving set. Then he sat there, his elbows on the desk and holding the 'phones to his ears, for a moment pressing them tight, then gradually drawing them away and clear of his ears.

The desk was littered with paper. His gaze fell on innumerable scribblings of unintelligible numerals and letters.

"What's all this?" he said, bunching up the paper.

"That's what the kids and I have been able to get," Shorty answered. "Only hear her in spots. Maybe you can dope something out of that with what you get."

Blackie swept it off the desk into the waste basket.

"Rather start fresh," he laughed.

For fully ten minutes he listened without writing down a thing. With closed eyes, he sat back and concentrated intensely on that high-frequency note that occasionally peeped in above the continuous deafening roar. Now and then he was able to

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distinguish a solitary letter or a numeral. At length he looked up at Shorty.

"Tough stuff!"

"Worst I ever struck," the other affirmed. "He's sending double, and repeating over and over; but I don't think it's any use——"

"Sh." Blackie bent over on the desk, and pressed hard on the 'phones. In a momentary lull, he made out—

"LAT—"

Then in came those long roaring discharges, that threatened to burst his eardrums. It was now so bad that he was finding it almost impossible to keep the receivers down tight on his ears.

"Getting worse," he announced shortly—

"Lucky if we don't burn out a coil. That audion bulb is standing the gaff, eh?"

For almost an hour he sat there, tense and alert, holding the 'phones a little up from his ears, ready to clamp them down tight at the first momentary let-up. Then, as before, there came another tiny fleeting space of time during which the static ceased to roar. In came those distant signals, clear and distinct—

"NG 153 EAS," he made out; then—roar—

Blackie straightened up in his chair.

"Boy, I've got her longitude!" Putting LO before the NG, and T after EAS, he wrote—

"LONG 153 EAST. LAT—"

"That's her longitude all right," he exulted. "One-fifty three east. No chance of going wrong there. Man, I'd do ten years in 'Eighty-four' to be able to get that latitude!"

"Shall I take what you got up to the old gent?"

Blackie thought a minute.

"Why, we're heading right for longitude one-fifty-three, Shorty. Guam is in about one-forty-five. The question is: Where, on one-fifty-three? How much north or south of us is she? The old man is liable to hand you a growl, if you bring that up to him."

Shorty started to say something; but Blackie choked him off with a hiss.

He sat up and looked at Shorty thoughtfully.

"T 3 N," he was saying over and over. Finally, he wrote the combination down and sat back with his head cocked sidewise, looking at it. "Can you dope that out, Shorty?"

"'T 3 N' is all I can dope out. That might be a part of anything."

"No. You're dead wrong. Those are the best three letters we could have got, and there's only one place where they fit."

Shorty scratched his head.

"You're out of my depth, old scout."

"Shorty, what follows the word LAT in a position report?"

"Why, a numeral, and then either NORTH or SOUTH."

"Exactly!" Blackie cut in. "Now look." He wrote LA before the T, making LAT 3 N. "Now," he went on, "the word after the six is either NORTH or SOUTH. Hence, latitude three north. Nothing deep about that, is there?"

"No. Hang it, boy, you're a bear! Sure I see daylight now!"

"And, altogether, that gives us this," Blackie concluded, writing:

LAT 3 NORTH. LONG 153 EAST.

(A word here: Operators sending position reports from ships at sea invariably abbreviate the words longitude and latitude to LONG and LAT.)

"You're dead sure that was an N, not an S?" said Shorty, picking up the message. "Not much difference between 'em."

"Absolutely positive!"

"Boy!" cried the exuberant Shorty. "I'll tell the whole world you're a bear!" With that he lurched out of the radio room, and went groping wildly toward the bridge.

THE *Faralone* changed course to almost south. This brought her broadside on to the wind and sea. Instead of heading into it, she now had the furious onslaught full on her port side. Instead of pitching, she rolled. And it was a roll that made even the old-timers hold their breath. All night long she rolled continuously, many times more than forty-five degrees. Tons of water, shipped with each lay-over through gun-ports, rushed across her decks.

Some time on the mid watch, the port whale-boat was torn from its davits and carried away. No attempt was made to save it—men on the upper decks had all they could do to keep themselves from being washed overboard.

Below, men lay in their hammocks with eyes wide open, speculating on how many minutes longer the ship would remain afloat. Every time she lay over, the same

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thought flashed through every mind aboard—

"She's going right over this time sure!" Yet, providentially, morning found the big vessel still plowing her way southward.

Late that afternoon a halyard parted, and the wireless antenna came down with a crash. In a hopeless tangle among boats, ventilators and smoke-stacks, it lay where it had fallen. To attempt to go aloft and reeve off a new halyard would have been stark lunacy—suicide! Hence, without an antenna, the *Faralone* operators were unable to get a verification of the message Blackie had turned in.

The second night was a repetition of the first. The big gray sea-hound dashed on toward that tiny spot on the map from where a ship had sent her call. And still she continued to roll.

The rumbling of loose buckets, ditty boxes and chests back and forth across the deck; the cursing of staggering seasick men; the throb of the panting, overtaxed engines; made of the big ship a veritable floating madhouse. Said Frisky Malone, going on watch that night:

"Alongside of this, —— is a Methodist Sunday School!"

Not until late the second afternoon, did the elements give indications of a let-up. Then steadily it grew less and less violent. By dark the abatement was so perceptible that men began to breathe easy. Gradually the rolling became less and less, until the ship was not laying over more than twenty-five degrees. The pounding rush of water against the gun-ports ceased. Men going on watch at midnight were able to hear each other's voices above the howl of the wind; and before they came off at four o'clock, the wind had died down to a light breeze.

At daylight Captain Doone came up on the bridge, and rubbed his hands gleefully as he looked at the brightening sky and surroundings.

"Looks good, eh, Mr. Balde?" he said. "Now, let's get a position. We're pretty close to her—or where she was. Also, let's get some lookouts aloft with good glasses." Then, to the marine orderly standing near—

"Orderly, tell the chief radio electrician to get that antenna up as soon as he can."

At eleven that morning, the lookout in the fore-top rang up the bridge.

"Smoke dead ahead, sir" he reported through the speaking tube.

Five minutes later, the lookout rang again.

"Smoke's gone, sir! Can't see a thing now."

"Very well," the officer of the deck acknowledged. "Look sharp now!" Then he called up to Captain Doone, on the flying bridge— "He reports that the smoke has disappeared, sir."

Captain Doone focused his glasses on the horizon.

"Smoke's gone, eh?" he mused. "What do you think about it, Mr. Balde? Saw smoke not ten minutes ago; now he can't see a thing. Do you think what I do?"

Commander Balde thought a moment.

"It doesn't seem probable, sir, that a ship would weather a typhoon, and then sink after it was all over, and things began to look rosy. Possible though. There are records of such instances."

Again the man in the top rang up the bridge.

"Something dead ahead, sir. Right where the smoke was. Can't make it out. Just a tiny speck.

"Ask the engineer officer," called the captain from the flying bridge, "if he's got a final sprint left in those engines."

The tiny speck turned out to be several tiny specks. Tiny specks of floating humanity. Eight boatloads of human souls, adrift out on the vast Pacific, hundreds of miles from the nearest island!

"Now, Mr. Balde," ordered Captain Doone briskly, "let's make this snappy. Get an electrician on that starboard crane. Hook on the sailing launch. We'll just lower our launch and gather 'em up. Quickest way. No room aboard for their boats—have to cast 'em adrift." Then to the officer of the deck:

"I'm going to bring 'em up on our starboard hand, Mr. Wellton. Watch your engines—don't overshoot 'em!" Captain Doone then took up a megaphone. "I want every man on his toes now!" he bellowed to the forecastle.

"That's well done, Mr. Wellton," he said enthusiastically, as the *Faralone* came to a dead stop with the group of boats alongside.

The electric crane began to hum, and the sailing launch hooked to it became a human scoop.

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THE last boatload was being hoisted. Nearly two hundred men, women and children from the sunken vessel huddled in groups on the upper decks.

Aloft, nearly a hundred feet over their heads, the man who three nights before had snatched from the elements the message that sent the big ship on that wild southerly dash, was reeving off a new antenna halyard.

On the bridge Captain Doone and the skipper of the lost *Minnie Mine* were shaking hands. "Lose any lives, skipper?" questioned Captain Doone.

"Don't think so," returned the weather-beaten old "Shell-back." "Had plenty time to get 'em all off. We only abandoned her a couple of hours ago. She sunk just before you hove in sight. If you'd been a half-hour sooner, you'd seen 'er go."

"Yes, my lookout in the top saw your smoke. What happened?"

"Scraped something—uncharted rock, I guess. Stove in a couple of plates. Could have patched 'em in a calm. But right then that blow came up—couldn't do a thing with the ship standin' on 'er ear! Gradually got the best of us. Where was yuh when yuh snared my SOS. Gad! Look at that!"

A child had fallen from the boat being hoisted!

It occurred right at the instant the electrician started the boat on its swing inboard. The boat started inboard with a jerk. At that instant the baby, in its mother's lap, leaned outboard. Before its mother could grasp it, the little one had toppled over the side into the water.

From up on the mainmast Blackie saw the tiny bundle of clothes strike the water, and start drifting outboard. With the agility and certitude of a monkey in a tree, and not once taking his eyes from the gradually sinking object, he scrambled out on the yard-arm. For just a second he perched. Then, with a spring to take him outboard, he leaped.

In that moment when those on deck stood hesitating between decision and action, there was a splash and upheaval of water close to where the child was slowly sinking.

"Drop that boat again, electrician!" came from the bridge.

Blackie handed the baby up into the launch; then swam for the quarterdeck ladder.

OVER a sea that was as smooth as glass, the *Faralone* glided on her way to Honolulu. Tranquil and blue, the Pacific stretched away over the horizon. The warm tropical sun beat down out of a cloudless sky; yet a cooling balmy breeze was astir. Flying fish rose out of the water on all sides, to the delight of the children romping the decks.

There was a pleasing oddity, a happy novelty, in having women and children aboard a man-o'-war, that somehow took the chronic out of the chronic grouch.

On the forecastle, Frisky Malone's two hundred pounds of bulk was rolling on deck in a desperate rough-and-tumble battle with a half dozen gleeful youngsters.

"Wouldn't it be some Navy," he said, sitting up, "if a man could have his wife an' kids aboard?"

Leaning against the turret nearby, Blackie felt a timid touch at his arm. He turned to look into a pair of blue eyes.

"Pardon me. Are you Mr. Blackhurst, who rescued my baby?"

Blackie swallowed, his lips twitched, and suddenly he realized that he was helplessly tongue-tied. He heard her soft earnest voice thanking and extolling him, but he couldn't find voice to reply. And then another realization was borne in on him. He was holding something tiny and soft and clinging. Two chubby baby arms encircled his neck.

The feel of the soft flesh against his cheek sent a thrill through him that reached to his toes and finger-tips. "Boomer" operator, sailor and rolling stone that he was, the sensation of fondling a child in his arms was new to him.

"Oh, Blackhurst," interrupted the marine orderly, "captain wants you aft."

Down in the cabin the captain was talking to his yeoman. Both had their backs to him, so Blackie entered unobserved.

"Make it in two letters, Roscoe," the captain was saying. "Two separate letters: one recommending him for a life-saving medal—go strong on that dive off the yard-arm; and the other recommending he be advanced to the rank of radio gunner—play heavy on his operating efficiency. That's all. Make it strong," he added, as the yeoman turned to start out.

Blackie was about to back out, when the captain swung round in his chair.

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"Good morning, Blackhurst. That's all, Roscoe."

The yeoman went out, and Blackie stood at attention. After eying Blackie a minute, the old man began, "Blackhurst, what is it you fellows call it when you swear off drinking?—there's an expression——"

"Going 'up the pole,'" Blackie responded.

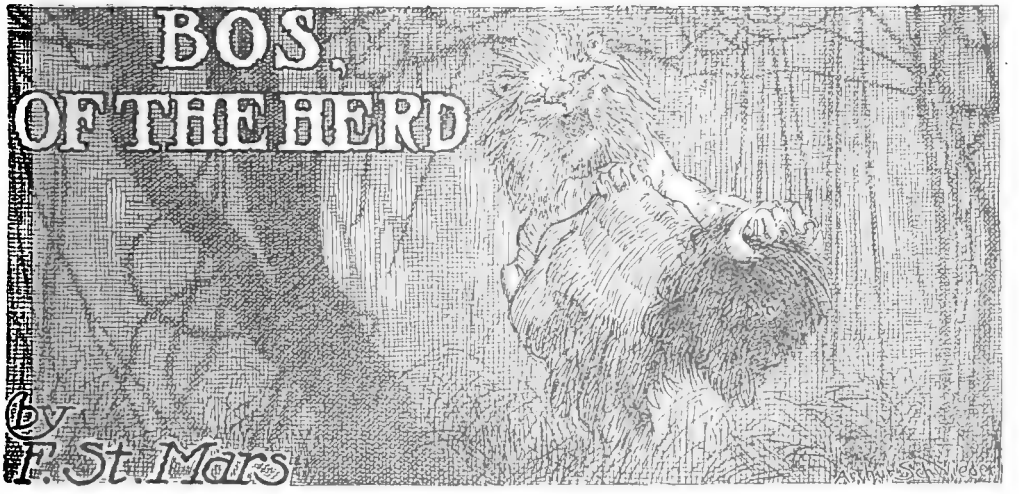
"That's it. Now, Blackhurst, do you think you could go up the pole, and keep from slipping down until I got a couple of letters through to Washington?"

"I think, sir, that I could make a good try at it."

"Do that," said the captain earnestly. "Do that, and I'll start you off on your third enlistment—provided you want to ship over—with as promising a future as a man could hope for. Do that, and I'll have you made radio gunner just like that"—snapping his fingers— "and I'll transfer you to any ship or shore station you want to go to. I'll use my full influence to push you up the ladder.

"I'll urge every officer under my command to use his influence. But you know, Blackhurst, ultimately, success or failure depends on the man himself. The combined influence of all the officers on this ship can't help a man, if that man will not help himself. Think this over well. That is all. Are you up the pole now?"

"Absolutely! High and dry," replied Blackie.



Author of "N'Gulule," "The Swordsman," etc.

THERE is a menacing thunder in storm seas. There is an awe-inspiring touch about the thunder of thunder; and the thunder of a flood is not nice, not in the least. Those who have heard it aver that the thunder of an avalanche for terrifying heart-grip is hard to beat, and I know that the thunder of a horse stampede runs all up and down your spine. But the thunder that broke through the stifling night under the stilly shade of the great, spreading euphorbia trees was different from all these, and very terrible indeed.

Mind, in spite of the lightning shivering along the far mountain ridges, not a thing could be seen. In there under the trees it was as dark as the pit; but the blackness was filled with little noises of unseen life getting away all about as the ground shook.

The sound as of gigantic purring and of bones being cracked near at hand, ceased with considerable abruptness, and two great green lamps—eyes, I mean—were switched on. In ten seconds they were switched off. Big and receding thumps followed, and one judged that here was a lion disturbed at his meal by the tremendous sound, and that he was off.

And all the time the thunder grew, and grew, and grew till it filled all earth and air and sky, but even above the crashing of

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brushwood and pistol-like reports of snapped saplings one could tell, could feel, that it was a living thunder, a thunder created by hundreds of hoofs, a thunder weighted with hundreds of tons behind those hoofs.

In an incredibly short space of seconds the living roar was upon the scene, filled it with an intolerable inferno of uproar, was over it, swept on, reached the edge of the plain and the trees, hurled on into the moonlight, turned into a tremendous living tidal wave of huge, packed black bodies, glinting horns, foam-flecks, glistening eyeballs, tossing tails and clouds of dust. Then it stopped, and the thunder died to a hush that seemed, by comparison, like a thousand-ton weight.

And thus you had then your Cape buffalo —very many hundreds of miles from any Cape or cape—your *Bos caffer*, your "nairi," or whatever name you like to call them—there in the stark moonlight, there with heaving flank and steaming nostril, there with bulged, bloodshot eye and massy glinting horn, there they stood, en masse, the herd, one hundred and fifty-seven huge beasts, snorting, stamping, rampaging for the blood of the lion. And they had only smelt him, mark you; just one little strayed whiff of him from four hundred yards upwind—him and his red feast in the night. Had they seen him—but never mind. He was a quarter of a mile away now, and galloping for his life. He never saw the thorn bush, under which he had been lying, as it appeared after the charging herd had passed over it. But then he could not, of course. There was no thorn bush, not so much as a whole stick of it left. Only matchwood stamped into the beaten earth—flat.

They were all there, those buffalo, all but the few cows who had calves, hidden in secret places, all one hundred and fifty and seven of them, the biggest, heaviest, fiercest combination in wild ox—for that is what it came to—the world has ever seen or will see. The width of their great wet muzzles and backs and low-sweeping, helmeted horns was enough to make the steadiest man think, the unsteady to quit in quick time. When Nature carved out the first model for those beasts she was doing the biggest thing in mammalia she had done to date short of elephant, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus.

But that was nothing.

A huge jet mass on the very apex of the right-hand point of the horn-shaped formation of the herd—for, like a Zulu impi, they charged and fought in crescent rank—heaved itself slowly asunder from the rest, and stood forth. The cynical, impassive moonlight caught him, and—the others did not count!

You did not want telling ten times over that that bull beast was leader of that herd; you knew it—at once. One eye he had, and a healed broken jaw, and half a tail and—that even did not count. Nothing counted except his size; except, more even than his size: his "ponderousness." Yet if I were to tell you how much over five feet three inches he stood at the shoulder; or longer than nine feet he measured from nose to rump; or how far beyond three-feet-nine his weighty horns taped in actual span, one yard in length along the curve, in breadth more than sixteen inches where they covered his head, flattened and furrowed and ribbed like a very helmet that would have defied any bullet more surely than a battle-hat, before they narrowed and bent down on either side of his enormous head and big fringed ears, and then turned up and back in one grand menacing sweep—most assuredly you would not believe me. His weight man never knew, and to guess, say, how near a ton he scaled were to be laughed at. You can only hazard his age; men said—black men, naked, savage hunters—that they had known him thus, just like that, unchanged, and leader of that herd for twelve years alone, therefore that he was of a great age as the wild kindred go.

For as long perhaps as a man would take to bring the sights of a rifle to bear carefully, the big bull—or the biggest bull, rather, for that herd held many bulls normally considered big when *he* was not by—stood forth thus in the pitiless moonlight rigid as a statue cut in obsidian, while the herd breathed heavily all about him, and the warm reek of cattle filled the air. And in the silence all heard distinctly from way back in the direction they had come, a far-off, quite peculiar moaning bellow.

Its effect upon the herd was extraordinary. It froze every massive black form stiff. It threw every enormous, heavily fringed ear forward, cocked; every broad, bulging nostril dilated; every wide, staring eye focused. And—the leader was not! He had vanished as a blast of his own steaming

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breath might, dissolved out of the moonlight after the fashion of a smoke-puff, faded, ghost-fashion and without a sound. He gave no explanation. He uttered never a snort. He was. He was not. Only the huge imprints of his splayed hoofs were left in the softish ground to prove that he had ever been a real, live buffalo of this world at all.

A quarter of a mile away there is the big bull, Bos—what is even a buffalo without a name?—trotting along swift as a horse through the interminable Nyika, the dread gray thorn "bush," through which you or I, failing a beaten game-path, could only have hacked a slow and painful way.

If you do not know the African buffalo you can scarcely believe that so ponderous a brute could move at so great a pace. If you do not know the Nyika you can scarcely imagine that blind maze of a million spikes or understand all the terror and the mystery that single word implies.

Bos was making directly toward that single, moaning bellow, steering a straight course almost—a thing that only three other beasts in the continent could do and remain with flesh on their bones—namely: the hippopotamus, the rhinoceros, and the elephant.

When he got near, however, the manner of the big bull's progress changed. He picked his path, doubling and twisting wonderfully. He became as stealthy as a cat, sinister as a lion, silent as a spook. There was something about that soundless, ingliding of the mighty brute that made one's hair creep; it was so cunning, so implacable, so deadly.

Suddenly Bos, in his own length, stopped—halted 'twixt stride and stride, one fore-hoof upraised, moveless as a coal-black titanic sculpture in the mysterious gloom. Nothing, mind you, could be seen five yards ahead, but enough could be heard. A steady, low, wicked, and ceaseless growling filled the night. A reek of cattle hung on the air.

Bos moved forward inch by stealthy inch, his progress a marvel of silence, a white light upon the ways of buffalo. And—his charge that followed, crashing asunder the screen that hid him from a clearing ahead, utterly without warning, was so sudden that even the lion and the cow buffalo that were standing facing one another there were momentarily paralyzed in their tracks where they stood.

NOW, it has been written, and many hunters have said, that an African buffalo utters that peculiar moaning bellow before mentioned only when it is dying—when it is passing out of this world for ever. But there is another time when that strange, moaning sound may be heard also, and that is when a buffalo life is coming into the world. That buffalo there was a cow, and she was calving. The cows withdraw from the herd at such a time to some secret place in the heart of the bush, and it had so happened that the lion, fleeing on a circling course from the hoofed wrath to come, had run fairly on to her. The cow had charged at once; the lion in a vile temper had charged back, and at the moment Bos crashed upon the pair of them the cow, scarcely able to stand, was practically in extremis.

Now the only practicable path into that clearing was the path made through the bush by the cow buffalo herself, and followed by Bos; it was also the only path out of it. All the rest was a living rampart of tangled thorns, each spike four to six inches long. At least, it was the only path for lesser beasts than buffaloes; the latter, of course, could go where they chose. And Bos himself was now between lion and escape.

But there was another way, not a path, possible only to the lion and not to buffaloes, a perpendicular five-foot bank walling in the place on one side, and the lion took it; he threw as it were the dignity of his crown to the winds, and took it—in one fine leap, flying.

Now mark the almost unbelievable quickness of the African buffalo. Bos grazed along that bank in full thundering charge, his great, sweeping horn on that side—the left-hand one—carrying away vine and creeper and thorn as broom sweeps down cobwebs.

For an immeasurable fraction of an instant the lion balanced upon the summit of the bank as a cat that tops a wall, tensing his muscles for the leap onward; and in that fraction of time the tip of the big bull's horn caught him on the flank. It only seemed to touch him as Bos swept on—a mere graze, you would have said—yet it spun the lion clean round and dropped him back into the clearing again as if he were no more than a kitten that had been picked up by the scruff of the neck.

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As he fell, a great gash flamed along his hip. As he fell too he struck open-clawed—bat, bat—a terrible, round-arm, gridiron stroke; and as he fell, finally, he landed upon his feet, true to his tribal reputation, and was away on three legs up the now unguarded buffalo path, in a flash.

Bos, pulling up in a young avalanch of vegetation, spun on his hoofs like a top, saw he was too late and stopped with his great head up, blowing like a whale. Victor, yes, and in what a fight! But the awful, rumbling roar flung back by the lion as he vanished was no ordinary roar—a warning and a threat boding ill for the buffaloes in the future.

Bos looked at the cow, his favorite cow she was—one long, bloodshot stare. Then—then he went away very softly, minding where he stepped. He had seen that in the wild mother-eye that warned even him in his might to be gone, and he took the hint.

The first cold, wan finger of dawn had not paled the east, the nightjars were still churring their monotonous reel, and the hyenas were still booming their horrible cries—wicked men living under a spell, the Arabs say—when Bos, grazing with the buffalo herd out on the grassy veldt, threw up his grand head and sniffed noisily that lean wind that runs before the true day.

THEN, without a sound, he swung off through the gloom on that wonderful free march of all the cattle people, which seems so slow comparatively, and is so heartbreaking to trail over the rough ground of the wilderness. And instantly, one by one, falling into line as a fleet of battle-ships that puts to sea, the herd strung out in his wake.

The leader had uttered no sound as command—had given no sign. Yet within a minute or so, without haste, as without delay, the whole herd was on the move through the mist as one beast. The wonderful discipline ingrained by a hundred—or was it a hundred hundred?—thousand years of herd law, like that other but less imposing system of pack law, brooked no delay, permitted no hesitation; utter, unquestioning obedience was required and given. Any who refused lived alone, banned, outcast, marooned upon the sea of life for ever. There was no compromise, no mercy, no weakening.

All the wilderness, as you know, is mapped with game-paths, some a year, some maybe a thousand years old, trodden from time immemorial by wild and savage beast, often, too, by scarcely less wild and savage man. These the herds follow and seem to know as surely as a man walking the streets of his native town.

Thus, then, you have the buffaloes in single file, a thin and wary old cow following Bos's enormous swinging flanks, behind her the second biggest herd bull, behind him the third, and so on back to yearling bulls, cows, cows with calf at hoof, and young heifers.

Once, but absolutely without a check of any kind whatsoever, Bos swerved aside and made a detour round a gap between two towering thorn thickets, the herd silently copying him—a pitfall there, staked, dug by the natives.

Once he blew three great snorts, and checked, rigid, at gaze, the herd still as rock behind him—a hunting-leopard, or cheetah, stalking its prey, who promptly decided to postpone that stalk to a place and time more healthy. Once, also blowing and pawing, Bos thrust back on the herd, blowing and pawing, forming at once a circle—cows and calves in the middle—on either hand from him, as a pack of nature's hounds, wild hunting-dogs, dumb as Death their master, went loping by, hard on the trail of some luckless impalla antelope.

All about them, as they thrust steadily onward in the mist and the gloom, invisible beasts snorted, stamped, crashed, or drummed away as their natures and their fancies prompted them. These were game, wildebeeste, hartebeeste, eland, roan, impalla, Grant's and Thomson's gazelles—antelope all, in their herds and their hundreds.

At times, one or other, cows with calves more especially, lowered head or stamped, posturing with the unseen uncannily—a sign, probably, that some beasts of no good character, hyena or jackal, maybe, were hanging on the flanks of the herd for what in the sick or injured calf line might by some fluke be cut off.

Now and then a nasal "quu-ha-ha!" rang out ahead of them, as a drumming thunder denoted galloping, restless zebra. At one point all got out of the way for a moving mud-hill whistling like a steam-engine, that scent said was a crusty old rhinoceros walking as if the wild belonged to him. And at last a perfectly terrifying bass bellow

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close to the ground brought the herd up all standing—to let something that grunted like a thousand times magnified pig go by, the same being a short-tempered old bull hippopotamus.

The buffaloes fell in his wake. Where he led, a regiment might walk. And even as they did so the sky and their surroundings began to change together. Trees crowded together, palms appearing now frequently. Bush gave place to rush and reed, growing thicker and thicker, till a vast, monotonous sea of papyrus, tall as an elephant, plumed and stately, hemmed them in.

And with the change of scene changed the animals also. Waterbuck fed on the edge of the swamp, ugly wart-hogs grunted out of their path, reedbuck crashed from underfoot, elephant could be heard, hippopotami bellowed on every hand. There was nothing else except the marsh birds; the teeming herds of the plains, the open veldt, found no place here.

Under the last of the trees, an ancient tottering, thorny mimosa, crowned by many little white herons, Bos halted almost with a jerk. A reed rope crossed low in his path. The great wet muzzle stretched down to sniff at this new thing was as hastily withdrawn. But the terrific weight of the body could not be quite instantly checked. One enormous splayed hoof came down upon the rope, touching it lightly. Instantly was a rustle in the tree above. One branch flew back into place as if relieved of a heavyweight. Something fell with a swish, straight and gleaming in the first pale dawn-light. A thud followed, and the mighty bull, with a snort that echoed over the marsh, disturbing the ibises from their fishing, stumbled, recovered and crashed heavily forward on to his knees.

FOR a moment it appeared as if the magnificent old fellow was done for; for perhaps half a minute, while he remained thus motionless, with the herd snorting, blowing, plunging, splashing, smashing all about him, it seemed that he must be dead—sacrificed to the cunning of man. It was indeed a treacherous thing, that treason, that attempted murder of the grand buffalo at the very threshold of his impenetrable fastness; that weighted spear-head in the tree above hung so true over the beaten trail as to fall directly upon the head of him whose hoof unhappily touched its holding rope.

And so, indeed, Bos would have been dead had he been any lesser bull, had the enormous gnarled helmet of his horns been any less massive, covered any less of his great head. As it was, even the spear-head was embedded there truly—but not in his brain. The rigid way he had fallen showed that.

Bos staggered to his feet as suddenly as he had gone down. The spear-head, imbedded in his horn-base still, had merely stunned him, but the great brute was visibly dazed, and stood motionless for a full minute.

Nor was there any sign of the herd. Stampeded by their leader's downfall, they had sought the depths of the marsh, where, standing belly-deep, they could defy even man himself. This act of the marsh in endowing her subjects with impregnability had also given them a peculiar individuality; bird and beast found there were not the same as those on the open veldt.

At last Bos lurched off slowly, stumbling through the mud and the shallows, and—described a complete circle. His return to the old mimosa tree again might have been a surprize had there been any but the dainty little white herons and the croaking bullfrogs to see. Apparently, however, if Bos's horns were too massive for the spear to pierce home, the force of the blow was there just the same. Even he could not be proof against that. And it seemed that the blow had destroyed, or dulled temporarily, some sense of direction that explained this pathetic wandering nowhere.

Moreover, the big bull stood now motionless for over an hour, oblivious alike to the sun and the ants who seemed to dispute ownership of the tree with the birds and the biting insects.

MEANWHILE, day, punctual to a tick, and very sudden, as it always is in those latitudes, leaped up. The sun blazed forth. Strings of Egyptian geese came winging by. Hosts of ducks, ibises, herons, storks and cormorants followed. The place became a teeming wonderland of bird life. And far away a flock of flamingoes approached like some rose-painted cloud of dawn.

Still the big bull stood motionless.

Old-timers might say that in this action he harbored an implacable idea of waiting

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for his enemy. Such things have been with the African buffalo; and we who can only grope after the thoughts lying back of their sullen eyes must merely guess. More probably the enemy was in his brain—a deadening effect from shock. Some slight hemorrhage had occurred at the nose already. The power to think, always slow, was probably now in abeyance.

But, whatever the cause of his strange trance-like inaction might be, there could be no doubt about its ending. And this came in so peculiar a way as to be worth notice.

The observant may have watched, and even the unobservant can not have failed to wonder at, those sudden, apparently inexplicable stampedes of even the most staid specimens of our own domestic cattle sometimes in the meadows upon a Summer day. This explanation for this seeming insane rushing about by first one then another individual of the dairy herd, as if pursued by some invisible ghost, is written in the one simple word—gadfly! Not only does this fly lay its eggs upon cattle, and the big grubs hatching therefrom burrow under the skin and cause indescribable suffering in feeding upon the living animal, but, as if in remorse at the torture she has inflicted, Nature has given to the gadfly a high, peculiar, and most piercing hum, recognizable instantly from that of any other insect, a hum which, warning the cattle, makes them run.

As it is with our herds, therefore, so also with Nature's. The extraordinary metallic, wire-like *ping* fell upon the enormous heavily fringed ears of the black and mighty buffalo bull literally like a bolt from the blue. The heritage of eons of terror at that metallic twang born in him, imbibed at his mother's udder, held true now, awaking by its very suddenness—and extraordinary loudness in the damp, stifling stillness—instinctive life in the otherwise numbed brain.

Up went Bos's half a tail; up, too, his head; and, stepping oddly high and stiffly, moving rather oddly, rocking-horse fashion, away he charged, splashing and crashing into the papyrus. Nor did he stop till he had reached the very depths of the swamp, where, plunging headlong into one of the deeper pools of a slimy compost of black mud and green water, he immersed himself even up to his great broad muzzle, and was still—as still as a cat.

The gadfly, swinging along—quite possibly by scent—passed him by. Moreover, one suspects its objection to the risk of a bath. Anyway, the dreaded hum died upon the stagnant heat, and presently the sudden upward fling of a flock of the little white herons away in the marsh—nearly always close attendants upon buffalo—revealed where it, or another, had discovered, and promptly upset, the herd itself.

Precisely what Bos did, or did not do, during the whole of the three days that followed, the marsh birds above knew. He must have been pretty badly shaken, or it is to be presumed he would have rejoined the herd. He was not so badly shaken that he forgot his revenge, though. Perhaps a wounded bull buffalo never is.

At any rate, there became a spot, close beside the game-path leading from firm ground to the old mimosa tree in the swamp, a spot, completely hidden from the path by a narrow screen of reeds, which looked like a cattle-stall, and a pretty well-used one at that.

And it occurred in due course—on the fourth day, to be exact—that the native who set that suspended spear-head trap was, upon going to see if the trap had slain anything, most savagely charged by an old bull buffalo from that said hiding-place behind the thin screen of reeds. Indeed, he was more than simply charged, for the buffalo let him pass before slipping out silently behind him into the path and charging him from the rear.

Had that native been any other than a Wanderobo he would have been a dead native in that moment, for the Wanderobo are an untamed breed, who live and die among the wild beasts they eternally hunt. With almost the quickness of a jackal and something of the address of a monkey this one miraculously invited himself into the branches of the old mimosa tree, alive if not unscratched. He discovered about the thorns when he had time to view his many scratches. The million and one red-hot ants he met later; but Bos, still as death, implacable as Fate, mounting guard over him at the base of that tree, troubled him most of all.

Thereafter the time crept along somehow.

DAY burned out at last; the thousand and one marsh birds got up and flew about against a blood-red sun, Japanese screen fashion, making marshy noises. And beasts began to

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explore down the reed-tunnels and crash about.

The moon, that presently was hauled aloft, shone upon the polished shield of Bos's horns and glinted back off the large, round white of his one workable eye, as if it were a bull's-eye target. The Wanderobo called upon his gods—of the forest they were—to come secretly and make this immovable buffalo bull die. Instead came, just before dawn, by no means secretly, and smelling scarcely god-like, some thing or things that made that immovable bull become very much alive. In fact, Bos charged—suddenly, instantly, *bash, smash, crash,* with every power of his brain, every pound of his great weight, behind the hurl of him.

There followed a sound as if two locomotives had met at speed, and there were puffings and snortings to match. No one could tell what was happening down there in the last of the dark before dawn, but the Wanderobo hunter distinctly heard and most distinctly saw Bos's great body come backward under the tree and then shoot forward again like some terrifically electrified battering-ram. The impact that followed again seemed to shake the ground and nearly brought down the black with fright.

Then the night lifted; the mist peeled off with the dawn-wind; and the native hunter beheld Bos, locked horn to horn with another great buffalo bull, leader of another herd, fleeing to the sanctuary of the marsh before white hunters, who had tracked them all the previous day, and would, probably, this.

Now, the battles of all the cattle people, from the mightiest to the least, hold true to certain tribal bovine rules and customs. During the first stage, stamping, snorting, shoving, straining, each bull endeavored to force his opponent back. In this, or even in meeting the terrible concussion of the charge—in spite of a six-inch gash aflame on the other bull's shoulder—there is no real risk.

Bos was untouched; his many scars all old ones. The massive, shrewdly designed horns were a perfect collision bulkhead, so to say. But it was in breaking the clinch by the weaker beast, forced back, in getting clear, and the exhaustion following, that the risk came. One saw this at once, when the other bull, forced back almost into a pool, unlocked his horns and received a bad gore in the ribs in swinging clear as the result.

Instantly, however, he charged Bos from short range, catching him fair on the shoulder with a concussion that would have knocked any lesser beast head over heels. As it was, the grand old bull was visibly shaken and bleeding badly now as he backed away.

Then it was that a strange thing happened. The other bull seemed suddenly to weaken. He did not follow up his victory, but stood motionless—staring, listening.

Bos, blind with rage, drew back step by step, then charged. It was a terrible collision. The other bull, caught fairly in the ribs, stumbled heavily sidewise, bellowed, fell, recovered and fled.

Bos threw up his head with a sudden alarmed snort, but he was too late. There was a yellow streak through the reeds, a rending roar, and something shot athwart the green. A clawing mass, reeking of carrion, fell upon Bos's head, one huge paw round his nose, forcing his head down and round, so that, before he could recover or brace himself for the shock, he had fallen upon his own head, his neck twisted under him. And—his great weight did the rest. The mighty buffalo bull rolled slowly over upon his side, uttered one long, deep, moaning bellow, and lay still—dead.

It was the old, old trick, the lion's trick of, by a wrenching jerk and surprize attack, forcing the mighty buffalo by his own weight to break his own neck. But I doubt if that lion—lame in the off hind-leg, by the by—the lion whom Bos had fought so gallantly only five nights ago, would ever have accomplished this vengeance had he sought his foe at any other than that unhappy moment, or without the help of the two lionesses who had simultaneously flung at old Bos on the flank.

ABOUT a week later the cow buffalo, whose life old Bos had undoubtedly saved, proudly rejoined the herd with her sturdy bull calf. Bos's calf, now fit to follow the herd, and destined one day, though none guessed it, to take his magnificent, proud old father's place.

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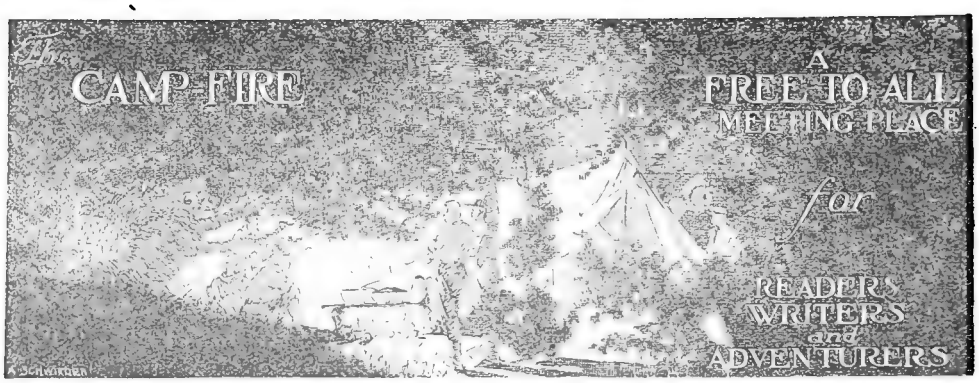

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A WORD from a comrade who served with one of our writers' brigade while the latter was collecting material for some of his stories:

Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Being a constant reader for quite some time, I wish to say I find great enjoyment in Camp-Fire and the adventures some of the readers have gone through. I've had a few myself and here's a half-dozen of them:

AT THE tender age of ten jumped off a train making forty miles per hour on Pan Handle Railroad, on its rock bed; in fore feet was cut up some but attended a circus that same evening. Pulled out of a river when down for third time. Fell off four-story house head-first when trying to get baseball out of rain gutter. Fell through ice while skating on river and five miles from home. Made sixteen trips to England on cattleboats. A member of U. S. Marine Corps for eight years; saw active service in Philippine Islands, China and at Vera Cruz, Mexico.

In closing would state was a friend of the writer of stories of China in our magazine, serving with him in same company in Philippine Islands and in Peking, China. His stories recall old Peking and other places he writes of in China to me, and I can assure Camp-Fire that Robert J. Pearsall knows China and Peking, as we saw everything that was to be seen for miles around. Pearsall and I served four years on U. S. Legation Guard in Peking, it being his good luck to write in story form of China.

I will be pleased to answer any Camp-Fire reader through its columns any question about the Chinese or Peking, China.—JOHN CHARLES STUART.

SOMETHING from Lieutenant-Colonel Rodney concerning his complete novel in this issue, in which are involved two of Camp-Fire's favorite subjects of discussion —the Custer Massacre and Calamity Jane:

Raleigh, North Carolina.

One of the pleasantest features of writing for *Adventure* is the personal touch that one gets in Camp-Fire where you rub elbows with the men you are trying to write for. It's a good deal like saying: "Fill 'em up again and listen while I tell you this

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one." You know that some one is listening while you yarn. An assured audience is much.

ABOUT the yarn "Bad Medicine"—Do any of you fellows know anything harder than, after a piece of work has been done, to tell how you came to think of it and do it?

The yarn was first suggested, I suppose, by a visit to the Custer battlefield in February of this year. The most casual glance at the terrain makes one think: "What a —— of a place this was to start a fight in." All bleak hills, bare as the back of a woman's hand with no cover except what is found in a few deep gullies that run back from the Little Big Horn. All the timber in which Reno's men once battled for their lives is gone. Yet, standing on the summit of the ridge looking down into the valley of the "Greasy Grass," one can easily enough visualize the whole scene as it was on that fatal day in June, 1876—the seething village, the yelling lines of the warriors, the red dust-clouds rising over the thousands of the pony herds and then the final scenes on that bare crest that lasted only forty-five minutes. Indian accounts say that only twelve or fourteen Indians were killed in the part of the battle where Custer was attacked. It is hardly believable, but it is insisted on.

THERE will always be acrimonious debate as to whether Custer deliberately disobeyed orders or not. A careful study of all available papers and accounts and a balancing of these with Custer's past record in the Civil War, when he made three attempts to have the Confederate Army surrender to him personally at Appomattox while General Lee was interviewing Grant about the surrender, does not leave much room to doubt that he deliberately took the first step of his course and then was forced into the second.

He was ordered to travel South on the Rosebud. To go twenty miles further South than the place where Reno had found the Indian trail to the westward. He did not do it. He struck off on that very trail a whole day's march before it was intended that he should and then, as always happens, one wrong thing having been done, the next was compelled. The Indian scouts found a box of hard bread that Custer's pack-mules had dropped and saw the column. They then had to hasten lest word of their coming should reach the Indians who would promptly leave. The result was the useless sacrifice of the entire column in an attempt to gain some personal advantage.

One can not write of the Black Hills without seeing the vision of Calamity Jane. From what people who know her well tell me, she was by no means the heroine that some people would make her out to be. She comes into any story of the Black Hills as King Charles' head came to *Mr. Dick*—but she was a long way from being any heroine.

WITH these characters and incidents others naturally appeared; prospectors (whom I have known); mining-camps like those I have seen; incidents that I have seen and heard—they wove themselves naturally into a yarn. To save my immortal soul (which I hope does not need any additional saving) I can not tell you how the yarn wove itself. You all know better than I can tell you how characters work out their own destinies and how an author has little to do with it after he has once selected his characters and given them their setting. In fact they are frequently so d—— stubborn that they simply will not do at all what you want them to do. Once I put a priest into a story and strove in all friendliness to make him a fine character but the hard-headed old devil insisted on drinking in every corner tavern; on gambling in an iron helmet and on "risking an eye" till in very desperation I had to unfrock him. Then I sold the story.

From all accounts Deadwood was pretty much like other mining-camps I have seen and that is just about as it is described.

I have tried to liven old bones in the yarn and if I have succeeded the success will be not the least part of the reward.—G. B. R.

AN old-timer of the West located in Kentucky. If he sees this, I hope he will drop us a line.

Jacksonville, Illinois.

I have been interested in the discussions as to the definition of the word "adventure." Personally I think that the best definition of "adventure" is that it is the wine or spice of life.

If some of the old-timers of the West will write to Captain Cole, caretaker of the National Cemetery at Camp Nelson, Ky., they might get some very interesting information, the captain having served a number of years in the West at the time of which they write. He is ninety-six years of age, is in exceptional health, and until last Summer drove a high-powered car all the time. He was personally acquainted with Buffalo Bill and many others. Among his experiences was being lost in the Californian desert for ten months with a detachment of troops, and also many Indian fights.

I will add that I found my first *Adventure* on the floor of a box-car near Peoria, and have read it ever since, and my wife can hardly wait for me to finish. —CHARLES O. PRESTON.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine, Charles V. Fischer, following Camp-Fire custom, rises and introduces himself to the rest of us:

Newark, New Jersey.

I regret to say that I have nothing to relate that could possibly be of interest to Camp-Fire. If, however, you have the time and patience to suffer through a paragraph or two, I don't mind telling you what little there is to be told about me.

I AM simply an ordinary rolling stone—have gathered no moss but have had the roll. I have been to a great many far-off places worth while and otherwise, in various capacities—man-o'-warsman, commercial radio operator, structural steel worker, etc. (a coal heaver for one trip, when belly-wrinkles threatened—Fusan, Korea, to Honolulu), oscillating, as most rolling stones do, between the high and the low waves of existence.

Not so long ago I was taken with a sudden attack of longing for home-made biscuits; and, as the crow flies, I headed homeward. Since returning to the old home the notion came into my head that I had a few tales to tell. And the day I received a check for "Up the Pole" I concluded that I had the right hunch. Of course I realize that there is many a slip

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etc. I realize too that, although I may possibly have a lot of good story material, many a good steak has been spoiled by the cook. But if you will give me a hand, by smoothing off a rough spot here and there, and making a suggestion now and then, I believe I can manage to get over the nascent humps, and eventually become a teller of tales that will amuse. I might add in passing that aboard ship I was said to have a very high "battin' average."

I promise you one thing: I'll not try to write about a place I have never been to; nor ring in any characters I have never known. And although my "Battin' average" is likely to run high at times, I'll keep within reason.—CHARLES V. FISCHER.

HERE is a novel idea from the Keeper of one of our Camp-Fire Stations. The sign he speaks of having run in the newspaper must have created quite a little wonderment and mystery for the uninitiated, for it contained only a reproduction of our 71 button with the Keeper's street address under it. Nothing else, not even his name. But any member of Camp-Fire (which means any one who likes to gather with us) would of course know just what these few marks meant. Two comrades saw, understood and acted at once. Judging from the good-comradeship showing in comrade Sciarra's brief letter, they had a good time and probably more comrades have been collected by this time.

Particularly in towns and the smaller cities some such sign run a few times in a local newspaper would be likely to unearth some comrades who might not be found by other means.

Uhrichsville, Ohio.

Received the register and signs and was very glad to get them. Already I have had some visitors. I ran a small sign in the paper here and Brothers Benson and Bovey dropped in to see me.

I'm sure I will have a lot of fun out of this Station and also perhaps I will be of some help to some of the Camp-Fireites. Anyway I hope so.—ANTHONY SCIARRA, 307 East 3rd Street.

THIS letter from Gordon MacCreagh, of our writers' brigade, written to me, I'm passing on to you, knowing he'll be glad to talk to Camp-Fire if he can be persuaded Camp-Fire will be interested, and I think I can guarantee that.

First, here are the clippings to which he refers in his letter:

DISORDERS AT LA PAZ

The Bolivian Legation has published the following circular telegram sent out by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of that Republic:

LA PAZ, March 3.—This morning a mutiny occurred here in a battalion of the Loa Regiment; the mutiny was suppressed by the officers of the battalion with the assistance of the other units of the Army. The populace surrounded the President of the Republic and offered to defend him to the last. The Government has declared military law in the Departments of La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba and Potosi.

A press dispatch reads as follows:

LA PAZ, March 3.—The origin of the mutinous outbreak at the barracks of Loa battalion No. 4 was the imprisonment yesterday by the police of six soldiers of the corps. At midnight the third company of the battalion inaugurated the uprising, carrying with them the other companies. They marched into the streets, firing volleys, and on arrival at the Plaza de Armas, secured the release of the prisoners but without entering the Police Barracks or the Palace.

The city is completely tranquil and the President and his Ministers are in the Palace.

The movement was entirely non-political.

As a result of the uprising four were killed and many wounded.

BUENOS AIRES, March 18.—Indians living in the high tablelands of Bolivia have risen against the Bolivian Government, and a native chief has proclaimed himself President of the Indian tribes, says a La Paz dispatch to the *Nacion*. Several encounters between the insurgents and provincial forces have resulted, and several persons have been killed and wounded.

Bolivian troops are reported to be on their way to suppress the revolt.

Bopi River
Department of La Paz
Bolivia. 1st of June, 1921.

Gosh, what a long way off that New York address seems!

Here's me. Camped on a river edge and waiting for a consignment of raft-builders to arrive. I sent a man to a point further down the river a week ago, to Rurinabaque, where it is said that "balseros" grow; but evidently the crop has been bad this year. So here I'm stuck. Somewhere between La Paz City and here is a caravan of fifty mules, bringing equipment for the expedition. Perhaps God knows where those mules are. All I know is that they should have been here according to schedule three days ago. This is the first time that I have been up against this "mañana" thing, and it drives me clear off the handle. One can make the most careful arrangements possible and take oaths from all concerned; and then, if there isn't a white man on the spot to *kick* them off on time they just don't start.

But I guess you have heard all this before. It isn't interesting; but just at present it is getting me right under the collar—but I haven't any collar.

Anyhow, this preamble is to establish the fact that I'm waiting for the rest of the expedition to arrive, and I'm fussing myself crazy to think that my lines of communication aren't all in shape. Oh, for a couple of white men at the other ends to keep time on the prearranged schedule! Gosh, how I wish J. were here!

Having arrived at another page, it seems that there is no more left to say but that I wrote just to say hello and goodby before making the long dive—or the trek, or the trail, or what is it that the Camp-Fire writers call it?—into the Amazon Basin.

I'd like to write you something that would be of

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interest to Camp-Fire; for I'm one of those who think it is the most interesting part of the magazine. But not a —— thing has happened. It never does, you know. Here I've been two months in the interior, and not a solitary matter of excitement has turned up.

SEE, for instance, the enclosed clippings. I was in both of them—and nothing happened.

The revolution story, given out by the president—I mean by the Bolivian legation in Lima, where this paper is printed, *The West Coast Leader*, and a —— good paper too—is kinder "edited." There was quite some free shooting in the streets, and more than a few innocent bystanders were bumped off. One of the funny incidents was the barricades. Barbed-wire—a single strand—stretched across the street ends—with space left at the edges for people to go round—those who didn't care to stoop and go under. As for the regiment—or regiments, rather. It seems that there was a general disaffection; and for the usual reason. The beggars wanted their pay. The system seems to be to keep *some* of them paid all the time; so that they may be on hand to squelch those who, therefore, don't have to be paid. The commander-in-chief, who is a wily Hun, of course, took the precaution some time ago of taking away the bolts of the rifles of all the troops he wasn't sure of; and it was quite a sight to see these guys drilling with their stingless guns. Right now—or at least, when I left—the city was still under martial law. All Government buildings were patrolled by a strong guard. Picked troops; and, my, you should see them drill! Those snuff-colored boys did their tricks of changing guard and coming to salute and all the rest as well as Germans. I'll bet it takes some licking to knock that technique into them.

By the way, you must edit this script as you go along. This mill fell into a river along with a whole mule-pack of other stuff, and it's been on the blink ever since.

BUT to revert to the other slip, the Indian revolt thing. That was really a part of the revolution. The malcontents had circulated it around that this was one of the periodical occasions when the "Descendant of the Incas" was on hand and that here was the time to reassert their independence. The Aymaras all round Lake Titicaca accordingly started to assert. This guy who is reported to have made himself president really calls himself a king and spilled the usual stuff about the sign of ancient descent from Atahualpa. So the merry Aymara leaped to his independence and nailed the local governor and his staff to trees. Lest some know-all rise to say "'T's a lie. There ain't no trees on the Altiplano of Bolivia" let me hurry to explain that the Indians showed their sense of humor by attaching him to the eucalyptus trees planted around his own hacienda.

The townsfolk were all het up about it, and they gathered in the market-places—I mean the *Plaza* and the *Prado;* they sound much better that way—and chattered that the Indians were surrounding the town; were gathering in thousands on the heights; and were going to attack on Easter Sunday. No, I mean, Saturday. For the Aymara has a delightful belief—being Christian, you know—that from three P.M. on Friday to 6 P.M. on Sunday God is dead—not yet having arisen, you see—and that therefore he can't see and take note of any sins committed during that period. So they save up their grudges of a year and lay for their unfriends at Easter. Great system, isn't it?

THE excitement, then, was vast. People loaded up their guns for bear and slept on them; and the police immediately issued an order that a special permit was required to go out of town limits; and everybody talked of the atrocities that the Aymara was capable of if he got a chance. And then, in the middle of all the fuss, I met a missionary man, who was coolly preparing to go out to *Lake Titicaca!* A Canadian—he was really a Scotchman domiciled in Canada (which makes a difference, you know). It seemed that he had an out station at the lake where a lone mission girl worker was marooned. She had contrived to get word in that the Indians had surrounded the place and were looting the mission crops. So the missionary man, while all the town chattered about attack, was coolly preparing to go out on a rescue party of one!

"Me too," says I, and a couple of other would-be heroes hopped in. But, alas, there was nothing heroic or exciting about it. We got out of town by the simple process of hiring an automobile and not telling the chauffeur where we were going till he was too far from Main Street to holler for a cop. Then, of course, four white men contained more moral suasion than a half-breed chauffeur.

BUT, golly, what a ride! Sixty miles to the lake over a road that showed in parts in the dry season. And this, please note, was not yet the end of the rains.

Three times the car got stuck over the floor-boards in rivers which the map says ain't; and twice in gummy clay up to the hubs. And who do you think pulled us out? The Indians! The wicked revoluting, blood-thirsty Aymara. We waited till a few hove in sight, and then just made 'em pull. The missionary knew the trick of it. The thing to do was to grab a man's poncho and hold it as a hostage till he had done his bit. Then he got it back with a tip of one real (three and a half cents). It's a grand system.

They—the Injuns—were kinder sore about it, of course; and in fact, were sullen whenever we met them. But not a one made any hostile advances. We had guns galore in sight, of course; but, thunder, we weren't an army—and from the stories I've read I understood that the Injun man leaped howling to the scalping fest as soon as he had even a little bit of odds. But these ferocious Aymaras just cussed and "looked daggers." That was as turbulent as they got. Five times, mind you, we had to make them help us out of the hole; and not once was there any sort of gun-play.

So I raise my voice loud into the atmosphere and state that it's a lie. The Injun man just ain't fierce; leastways, the ferocious and blood-thirsty Aymara ain't.

WE progressed, then, in spasms; till the inevitable happened. The car stuck up to the wheel-rims—upper rims—in a potato-field, and not a soul in sight.

So we acted in a masterly manner. We all prided ourselves on a knowledge of automobiles, and we knew what to do when a car stuck. So we up and abandoned the —— thing. Took our packs and hiked.

That was the most miserable night I have ever

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known. Night was just coming along by that time. It rained incessantly; and there, at fourteen thousand feet elevation, Bolivia wasn't any tropics. Further, at that elevation I'll swear that my load of camera and gun weighed eight hundred pounds. Did'jever hike at fourteen thousand feet? It's a job for he-men, I'll say. Me, I sat me down and rested with frequency and precision. And I thirsted. ——! how I thirsted. Water running off me in quarts and every ditch full to a height of several inches over the road; but so contaminated, the missionary assured us, that typhoid was our sure portion if we drank.

THEN Providence had compassion—in reward for keeping good company; missionaries and the like. In some miraculous manner it sent along Indians to release the car—Oh, I forgot to say that the chauffeur refused to abandon the car. I guess his employer had his poncho or something as hostage in La Paz. God knows how he induced the Indians to haul him out—'cause *he* had no guns and things. But presently, there he came, swishing and splashing and plowing along behind us—fortunately it was safer to follow us than to go back to La Paz. And, best of all, he brought news of a village not so far away where a man who kept a *takia* shop had three bottles of ginger-ale. *Takia* is llama dung, which is the only fuel they have up on the Altiplano.

Well, ——, what was there to do but to capture the blame place? Which we did, with gusto and éclat. We charged in, bristling with artillery from all corners of the car, expecting insurgent Indians to surround us with yells and scalping-knives. But the only person who met us was the *corregidor*. This gentleman, as his name implies, is the "correction officer" of the district. He told us that the Indians had kicked him out of office and were running things to suit themselves—which meant looting the other fellow's crops—there's nothing else to loot, you know. He hailed us as a special relief expedition sent out by God for his benefit. Under the ægis of our authority he promptly reestablished himself and begged us to wait and see him wield his badge of office—which is a long rawhide whip with a silver-mounted stock.

BUT we had to get going. Dark had arrived. So we told him our needs; and immediately he levied tribute upon the village of three bottles of ginger ale—only it turned out to be lemonade and it was five bottles. Why the —— the dung-dealer was conserving five bottles of lemonade I can't guess. Anyway, we didn't ask questions. We surely soaked it in. And then the corregidor issued instant and truculent orders for mules, which in due time came; and then, guided by a very submissive and surprising Indian, we proceeded across seven miles of a shallow arm of the lake, the Indian going ahead in his bare feet and breaking the thin ice. I kept being glad that my father wasn't an Aymara Indian of the Altiplano.

I'll have you know that that was cold. Riding a mule beast at night at fourteen thousand isn't Summer sport—and oh, by the way, it's Winter here now, of course.

WHEN we reached that mission farm I was so frozen that I was just able to fall off and hobble for shelter. Shelter in a Titicaca mission farm means a mud-walled establishment with mud rooms and thatch roofs, which have holes at the eaves through which the birds come for that same shelter. And remember, please, that llama-dung is too expensive to be used for warming up the scenery with. It is cooking fuel, pure and simple. So at Lake Titicaca folks go to bed as fast as they can after sundown.

Well, there was that brave girl, all alone—the Bolivian Farm Superintendent had contrived to get into town. A few converts and servants had remained faithful; and the girl had just run things. The Indians, she told us, had surrounded the place every night and had howled invitations to the inmates to come out and be killed like dogs. But they were just a little too scared of a possible charge of buckshot to do more than howl by night and loot the crops by day.

Our presence acted as a salutory reminder that "Descendants of the Inca" had been before and that vengeance was very sure. So the next morning there was a courtyard full of very subdued Indians who explained that they had had nothing at all to do with the rioting and that the "*malos hombres*" from the surrounding district had terrorized them into submission.

BUT the missionary sent for the nearest corregidor and held court. Men and women yelled and chattered and lied about one another. But guilt seemed finally to be fastened on to two of the crowd; and we witnessed a "correction."

The Aymara gets licked in a beautiful and simple manner. He is told, "Come and get licked, you dog." And then he takes off his poncho, kneels down, and just gets licked.

And these, mind you, were the ferocious, etc., Aymaras who were going to attack La Paz.

You surely have to hand it to that missionary. While the Bolivian Government "took a serious view of the situation" and while trains to the lake region were taken off because nobody could be got to run them, he went out, one lone preacher of the gospel, and set up the white man's authority—I think I told you he was Scotch. So, by the way, was the girl.

WELL, in a miraculous and pleasing manner that part of the lake was thenceforth perfectly tame. There didn't even seem to be any ill feeling among the Indians. They were as friendly as could be. Acted as guides for duck-shooting and for the digging of antiquities. And the next day, Saturday, they held their fiesta and got gorgeously drunk, man, woman and child—on fifty per cent. alcohol smuggled across the lake from Peru; and even then they didn't make any hostile advances. I was right in amongst them taking motion pictures of their weird dances, and they were as cheerful and friendly as one might wish.

That's the wild Aymara for you. So, as I said before, I lift up my voice and proclaim that those bad injuns are all tosh. They fight among themselves, of course. The night of that fiesta they contrived to kill two of themselves; and at two subsequent fiestas that I attended, "Discovery of the Cross," and "Corpus Christi," they croaked three and five. But as for demonstrations against the white man, Nix.

I WAS at Tiahuanaco (ancient pre-Inca ruins) for the recent Corpus Christi and I was living with the priest—funny how I get in with God-fearing folk—and he told me that some of the faithful had

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tipped him off that the sign had gone round among the Indians that this was to be the night for another uprising. He said that he thought *he* would be safe; but anyway he would like to borrow my shotgun, for he wasn't any kind of a shot and a scatter gun would be more useful to him. So I was left with a measly pistol. I wonder what made him think that *I* was any kind of a shot with a pistol!

However, by the time night came the whole village was too drunk to rise to any kind of a position at all; so the uprising was postponed till the next time the sign came round. Except, of course, the *malos hombres* who contrived to remain sober enough to do up the five of their compatriots.

And the next day one of the ferocious, etc., took me out to the ruins and dug up for me a whole fistful of copper and stone gods of the lost civilization.

Wherefore I repeat about the analogy between the fierce Injun and the well advertised bovine.

So that was all that came out of the trip from which I surely had hoped to have something to talk about at the Camp-Fire. No luck. But I live in hope. The rest of the trip down the Amazon side may be productive of something. If I get a chance, sending runners and such with expedition stuff, I shall surely send the word to you.

TALKING about runners, though. I came across an instance of running that is worthy of record —there have been some other references to it in Camp-Fire, haven't there? I saw an Indian, an ordinary peon, whose master had ridden sixty miles that day; and the Indian trotted along with a forty-pound pack on his back. The next day we, the master and I, rode forty-five miles together; and the same Injun trotted along with the same pack. Not so bad, is it?

And, oh, there is a snake story. I have heard some of the usual ones about the big uns, and from white men, too, who swear to have measured them after killing. But the largest doesn't go beyond sixteen meters; which is considerable more than science admits. My own story is about one that had eaten a cow and that lay up across a little river in a swamp —and in swimming the river it had raised a wave like a Hudson River steamboat. So I went out to get it and sell it for several thousand dollars. But the Injun swore that the big fellow must have gone away and another snake had lain up in its very place; for this one wasn't more than seventeen feet, a plain, ordinary Python Molurus, such as you can buy from Carl Ruhe in New York City for twenty-five dollars.

However, again, I have hopes. If that eighty-footer happens along I shall surely bring evidence—if I have to have it eat a dozen Indians.

GOSH, I've written a small book! Free manuscript at this rate hurts. I'm sending in a runner tomorrow to see what is happening to my mule caravan, so I have hopes that this may reach you in a month or so. But only God knows what happens to twenty per cent. of what goes into the maw of the Bolivian mail. Anyway, I shall pray for luck. I've learned an awful lot of prayers recently, associating with missionaries and priests and such.

Give my regards to the staff; and accept my wishes for continued prosperity of the magazine. I am going to send you a little stone god to help look after the same. The god is nameless, for this civilization is more lost than that of the Incas; but it is a copy, dug up by my injun, of the great monolith which stands in Tiahuanco plain, of which you will some day see motion pictures.

So goodby and goodnight. Me, I'm gonna go by-by—in a beastly hammock (which I hate) with festoons of mosquito netting. There aren't any mosquitoes at this season; but there are vampire bats; and they do bleed one up awful if one doesn't cover up. *Hasta la vista. Vaya Ud. con Dios.*—GORDON MACCREAGH.

IN ACCORDANCE with Camp-Fire custom, Henry C. Copeland rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Seattle, Washington.

I am going to make a confession.

IN NOVEMBER, 1919, when I was publishing the *Western Sportsman*, I bought a correspondence school's course in short story writing. However, I was so busy that I did nothing with it until November, 1920. Meantime I had renewed an old friendship with Raymond S. Spears, and Spears proceeded to sell me on the idea of breaking into the writing game.

I had made the rush into the Klondike over the Chilcoot Pass, drove dogteam for the Nugget Express, ran a roadhouse and saw quite a bit.

In the short story writing course, the eighth lesson is an eighteen hundred word story. The story in this issue is *it*.

While the criticism of the school was not unkind or generally unmerited, I nevertheless, could not entirely agree, so I sent the story on to Spears asking for his tum-tum. Spears says, "Put it up to the editor man." And I have done so.

While understanding that the truth of a story does not add to, and frequently detracts from, its value, I am going to state that I heard the shot by which *Rafferty* took his life and saw his body a few minutes later. The whipping also took place.—HENRY C. COPELAND.

THIS part of Central Oregon seems to have had quite a few stirring items in its history:

Hobart, Oklahoma.

It has occurred to me that the writers who more or less specialize on tales of the old Northwest—Idaho, Washington and Oregon, have, so far, overlooked one section of that historically most interesting country that offers the greatest wealth of material for real Western tales of romance and adventure.

I REFER to that section known as Central Oregon, stretching from Snake River to the summit of the Cascade Mountains, east and west; and from the California-Nevada line to the summit of the Blue mountains, north and south.

Owen Wister, in some of his Specimen Jones stories, such as "The Jimmyjohn Boss," has covered a part of the early cow and Indian days in Southeastern Oregon; and Anne Shannon Monroe has interestingly told some mighty good stories of homestead times out there. If some one with powers of description and story-telling ability would get

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hold of the facts of Pete French's life and the manner in which he acquired and held the great French-Glenn properties; how Henry Miller handled his immense holdings; the wild and woolly doings of Hank Vaughn, the Barnes Brothers, Prine, and other good bad-men of forty years ago in that bald-headed part of Oregon, it would make the most thrilling sort of reading to those interested in perpetuating the memories of those wild old days.

The story of the finding and losing of the still lost "Bluebucket Mine" and the numberless expeditions that have since tried to locate it. The true tale of the Vigilante days in Prineville, during which one fine morning the citizens of that little town awoke and found three or four men hanging from the old Ochoco Bridge by their necks. There are many stories about Hank Vaughn and his duels that would cause each particular hair to stand on end like the quills upon the fretful porcupine.

ONE of the most interesting true yarns of comparatively modern times in that country, was told me in Prineville along about 1906 by a man who called himself Selkirk. I do not think that Selkirk was his true name, but I have never been able to find out what his name is or what has become of him.

I was in Prineville that Fall on business connected with some railroad location work that I was doing in Central Oregon. District Court, which convened twice a year then, was in session at the time, and the little town was filled to overflowing with witnesses, jurymen, lawyers, officers and interested spectators. This was at the time of the culmination of a mighty severe little war between the cow and sheep men of Crook, Wheeler, Grant, Harney and Lake Counties, Oregon.

THIS war had been raging with more or less ferocity for several years, and the sheepmen, as usual, had been uniformly getting the hot end of it. Their haystacks, barns and buildings had been burned; sheep slaughtered and poisoned; camp tenders and sheep herders murdered; and life made miserable for them generally. They finally held a secret meeting and subscribed a large fund of money or the purpose of collecting evidence against the cattlemen. The local authorities in most of the counties, and in Crook County particularly, at this time, were notoriously in sympathy with the cattlemen, so no help could be expected from that quarter. It was decided to put the matter of investigation and the collection of evidence in the hands of a well known detective agency.

This man Selkirk was sent out to do the work; and the real story of his accomplishment, and how he did it, is one well worth the efforts of a much better story teller than yours truly. A rough outline of his procedure follows:

ABOUT a year previous to the time of my meeting with Selkirk, he drifted into the John Day Valley accoutered as a common laborer with a roll of blankets on his back. He hung around the little town of Mitchell in Wheeler County, which was the headquarters for a colony of Tennesseeans who had drifted into that section from Cumberland Gap; and some of those chaps were sure enough tough *hombres*.

Selkirk secured odd jobs as a hay-hand, cow-hand and any old thing he could get to do; keeping both ears figuratively close to the ground all the while; and he finally located a Tennessee family that seemed to him to be the real ring-leaders of the raiding and killing that was going on. He cultivated their close acquaintance and finally was admitted to the real inner circle and became one of the gang of night riders, and participated actively in a number of their raids.

HIS story of how he obtained their confidence; made love to the daughter of the old man and sister of the four or five boys who were the real ring-leaders; and of how he wormed his way right into the very inside of all their crooked doings, is a real, honest-to-gosh story; and would make a wonderful scenario for a Bill Hart picture; but anyhow, in the course of a few months he had all the evidence necessary to convict these men and to put the fear into a lot of very prominent church-going cattlemen; and the next problem was how to capture the gang.

A DANCE was advertised to take place at the cabin home of these men from Tennessee and Selkirk notified the sheriff of Wheeler County to be near the place the night of the dance with a wagon and team of good swift horses. During the course of the dance he invited the old man and the boys outside of the cabin, one at a time, at properly spaced intervals; on the pretense of having a demi-john concealed out there. When he had his man outside he proceeded to work on him with some ju-jutsu holds that he had learned in Japan, and he succeeded in hog-tying, gagging, and stacking each one up, without creating any disturbance. At a given signal the sheriff drove up, the men were corded up in the wagon, and a speedy trip made over the summit of the Blue Mountains, down the Ochoco River to Prineville, where the prisoners were securely jailed. They were all convicted and sent to the penitentiary for long terms on Selkirk's evidence, and some of the most prominent citizens of that section suddenly had important business a long ways elsewhere for the same reason, and the last sheep-cattle war was ended.

SELKIRK left that country right away afterward and I have never heard anything of him since. He apparently had had a wild and adventurous career, and was a wonderful speciman of man. He had been in the Philippines during the Spanish War and Insurrection as a scout under Young; then he spent a year or so in some special secret-service work in Japan, where he picked up a lot of those ju-jutsu tricks that stood him so well in hand.

He was one of the best snapshots with a pistol in either hand that I have ever seen; and he had a real uncanny control over what we usually term the involuntary muscles of his body. For instance; he could breathe at will through either nostril; or with either lobe of his lungs; and he could stop the beating of his heart, or at least subdue it appreciably for an instant or two. We tested him out on this with the help of Dr. J. H. Rosenberg of Prineville. He was about six feet in height, weighed about 175 pounds, and was most beautifully built and muscled. His stomach muscles were like the ridges on a washboard; and, at his invitation I have swung my right with all my power at his unprotected stomach and abdomen, with a great deal more injury to my good right fist than to his rugged body. It was about like slamming a 2 x 12 hard-wood plank.

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There is a world of real story material in the country between Burns and Prineville; and if any of your authors wants to go into that district some time in search of local color, or material for stories, I would be very glad, indeed, to give him all the assistance in my power, in the way of names of persons who knew these things; places, directions and what general data I possess.—C. C. C.

P. S.—It is possible that some of the Camp-Fire members know something about Selkirk and his history. If so, I would appreciate very much hearing it.

THOUGH this particular letter misses fire, it is of the type that helps, since it is one of those that help us keep our stories from slips. As I've said before, neither we in the office, nor any other small group of men, know enough to be experts on all parts of the earth and all phases of life. We have to depend on our readers for help. Put all Camp-Fire on the job and mistakes will have a hard time getting by without detection.

This man evidently thinks he's got us with the goods and feels sort of pleased and haughty, but that's all right. His letter is a perfectly decent one and he doesn't wallow around in a lot of abuse before making sure of his ground:

Boston, Mass.

In the Mid-July issue is a story by Rafael Sabatini. The incidents of which he writes are in the "Buccaneers of America" by John Esquemeling. See pages 164 to 181.

I wish to inquire if this practise is allowed by the editor.—JAMES V. HAMILTON.

It sure is. Esquemeling's narrative is history, or at least a generally acknowledged source. Any author who writes a story of Spanish Main pirates is a careless workman if he doesn't first familiarize himself with all that Esquemeling sets down. The events of which he tells are as much material for fiction as are the battles of Waterloo, Saratoga or Gettysburg.

Universal custom has long granted to fiction writers the privilege of twisting the facts of history to suit the requirements of their yarns, so long as they claim the yarns to be only fiction, not history. The degree to which they can twist history's facts is a matter left to their own judgment. No one would be fool enough to make Napoleon victorious at Waterloo, yet any one might be quite justified in making the hero's regiment do something that another regiment had really done at Waterloo or in some other battle, provided he didn't violate common knowledge by, for example, substituting some other regiment for Napoleon's Old Guard.

THERE are no definite rules. Just a matter of judgment. Take Hugh Pendexter, Harold Lamb, Bishop and Brodeur, Mundy and many others of our writers—often at Camp-Fire they state definitely the points at which they have deliberately—and quite justifiably—violated facts of history to knit their stories together and give them freer swing.

We knew that Mr. Sabatini had taken incidents from Esquemeling and given them to his fictitious hero, *Captain Blood*, and undoubtedly he knew that we knew. If he had been writing a fact article, he wouldn't have done that, nor would we have passed it if he had. But in fiction he was quite within his rights. As to judgment, probably less than one per cent. of our readers were sufficiently familiar with the details of Esquemeling's narrative to recognize these incidents and undoubtedly most of this one per cent. would take Mr. Sabatini's use of them as quite within his province as a fictionist and think no more about it.

OUR only kick on this old-timer is that he didn't talk anywhere near long enough. Here's hoping that he'll make up for it next time:

Cañon, Arizona.

The last issue of *Adventure* has stirred feelings in me that have been slumbering for several years, hence this letter and, as I wish to be numbered among the Camp-Fire comrades, will introduce myself very briefly.

BORN on the American frontier in 1847 or, to be more explicit, in Texas when Texas as a State was but two years old. I stayed with the frontier as long as it lasted or until Hanliper Clark, my boon companion, killed the Apache Kid, the last bad Injun in the Southwest. Mr. Hooker's words about Wild Bill and Cheyenne in 1875 reminded me that at that time I was riding bronks for Ore & Seansit, about five miles north of Cheyenne. Like Mr. Hooker I am sure we old-timers get some of our dates mixed. I was acquainted with Bill; had not seen him since he killed Thill Coe in Abiline, Kansas, Fall of 1871. If I may be so bold as to answer Mr. Hooker as to date of Wild Bill's death, it occurred in '76, as I was at that time head-quarters courier for General Crook and was at Fort Fetterman at the time and for the last time. Saw Jim Baker, with whom I had hunted in the country south of Brown's Hole; it was there I bid good-by to California.

Joe, who was killed at Red Cloud that Fall by Lenie Reghien (maybe spelled wrong), a Sioux half-breed, whom I found in Arizona thirty years ago when I came here. But I am taking too much space and will let up by hoping the Camp-Fire will welcome one more old-timer who is only staying around to save funeral expenses.—BOB HECKLE.

P. S.—The above is my name, though little known in the Northwest. Should Mr. Hooker care to ask I might give him a name he would remember.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: Mid-Nov., First and Mid-Dec., 1919; First Jan., First April, Mid-Sept., First Oct., First and Mid-Nov., First and Mid-Dec., 1920. Also all issues before First Oct., 1919. Write stating price including postage.—Address C. M. JOHNSON, 632½ 7th St., Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

In their homes or shops some members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to—maintain Stations where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1508 Columbia St., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 5444 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 103 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), care *Adventure*. Petrograd and its province, Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

14. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

15. Africa Part 2 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

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16. Africa Part 3 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

17. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East Africa
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

18. ★ Africa Part 5 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

19. Africa Part 6 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, 40 South Clark Street, Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

20. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

21. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

23. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

24. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California: Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

25. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

26. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

27. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATION, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

28. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

29. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

30. ✠ North American Snow Countries. Part 6
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

32. North American Snow Countries Part 8
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

33. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

34. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

35. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

36. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

37. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Saugatuck, Mich. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

38. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river trapping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs, and their markets.

39. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

40. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. Arthur Bent, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

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Snaphaunces, Matchlocks, Morning Stars

BESIDES being a firearms expert, Mr. Barker as an artist also has his points as the illustrations on the next page show:

Question:—"I am an enthusiastic collector of old weapons and have a large collection of old arms, all of the flint and percussion variety, and would like to add some older weapons. Could you give me any advice as to where I might procure specimens of the matchlock and snaphaunce variety of firearms? Can you describe for me the lock mechanism of these weapons? Do you know of any good book dealing with the primitive types of firearms? What sort of hand weapon was called the 'morning star,' and about what period was that weapon used?"—ROBERT L. BOWMAN, Fairmont, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—It gives me pleasure to reply to your inquiries. And as I am always particularly pleased to be of any assistance to brother collectors, will even devote a little time to a few sketches by way of illustration of my reply.

First, as to where you can procure specimens of matchlock and snaphaunce weapons. The greatest dealers in firearms in the world are Francis Bannerman's Sons, 501 Broadway, N. Y. City. I should advise you to send for their 1920 catalog. As it is a book of 400 illustrated pages—almost a history of firearms in itself—they charge fifty cents for it, which I presume you should send with the order for it. There you will find lists and illustrations of what you wish.

You might write Stephen Van Rensselaer, 805 Madison Ave., N. Y., (he has recently moved farther up-town, but I have not the new address at hand and this will reach him) and ask him for a list if he has one, or tell him what you want and ask if he has it and the price.

I have seen lists of Mr. F. O. Ellis, 30 Elm Place, Webster Groves, Missouri, whose prices seem fair, and I am told that his goods are satisfactory, but I have never dealt with him. I am going to order something from him next week.

I have dealt with Mr. Van Rensselaer and have bought some very fine pieces of him. You may use my name with him as having suggested him, but understand that I recommend none of these dealers, further than stating my own experience with them, if any.

Bannerman is absolutely reliable. His prices are apt to be high from the standpoint of a large collector. Personally I rarely have occasion to buy from him.

There are quite a few dealers throughout the country who do business by mail. I have heard much fault found with some. A Mr. Carter of Elkhorn, Wisconsin, has some fine things. I have met him at weapon auctions, and once bought three fine pieces of him. Understand, I do not recommend; however, it might prove interesting to send to him for his catalog.

Now as to the mechanism of snaphaunces and matchlocks. The first matchlocks, invented about 1424, had no trigger or tumbler, but a "serpentin" or "dragon," a sort of small linstock which held in its jaws a piece of rope so treated as, when lighted, to burn at the end with a live coal. This was brought down to the pan to ignite the powder. The serpentin, which at first passed through the stock, and later was on the side of the lock, like a side hammer, was a piece of metal, curved like the letter "S," in one end of which was a clamp or jaw to hold the match (or rope spoken of). Then followed one without a spring but with a trigger.

The earliest one I have—about 1450—has no spring, the serpentin and trigger being all one piece of metal, and passing through a slot in the stock. There was very little shape to these guns.

Then followed those with the serpentin on the side, which had a spring and tumblers and a trigger, the main spring sometimes being outside, as in a snaphaunce, sometimes inside, as in a flintlock. At first the serpentin faced toward the rear, in order more easily to facilitate the gunner blowing his match and keeping it alight.

There was also the double matchlock, mostly used for defending ramparts, its length being from three to seven feet. This has two match-holders working in opposite directions. One serpentin, connected with a trigger, brought match number one into contact with match number two, which was kept alight in a holder fixed on the barrel; and then, when it in turn had been lighted, by a further motion it was applied to the priming.

The snaphaunce, invented in Germany about 1570, was really the second form of flintlock (flints having been used with wheellocks), and is distinguished from the flintlock proper (invented in France about 1640) by the fact that all the mechanism was practically outside the lock. The main spring was outside, and the pan at first had a sliding cover like a wheellock—later changed to a frizzen similar to a flintlock. There were no tumblers, but there were two holes in the lock-plate, through which projected two balls of steel which held the cock at full and half cock. Upon pressure of the trigger, the arm inside (similar to a flintlock) was pressed back instead of up (as in a flintlock), which drew back the protruding balls and let the cock fall on the battery or frizzen. When the pan had the sliding cover the lock had a separate frizzen, hence sometimes called "semi-battery."

There have really been but *six* changes in the mode of ignition since gunpowder was invented, the snaphaunce and flintlock being of the same family.

If you are interested in the evolution, I would suggest that in *The Open Road* for August, 1920, published at 248 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., you will find an article entitled "The Evolution of Small Arms," by the writer. They sell on the stands for twenty-five cents. I do not know what a copy a year old would be. The editor, in trying to shorten it, took the liberty, in my absence, to make some changes, which he thought immaterial, and in so doing made several minor errors, but the facts are substantially correct.

I am enclosing you a photograph of the evolution of firearms. It is one of 27 photos of part of my personal collection, and which I use as a slide in my lecture on firearms. The photographer charges me twenty-five cents for each. Please return it to me, or if you desire to keep it you may do so, and send me the amount in stamps.

As to books. If you can obtain a copy, the finest thing I know is "An Illustrated History of Arms and Armour," by Auguste Demmin, with nearly 2,000 illustrations, published by George Bell & Sons,

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York St., London, Covent Garden, 1877. This work has about 65 pages out of 600, on firearms, and takes down only to 1840. The remainder is on earlier arms.

There is a set of books on firearms that every collector should own. They are by Prof. Charles Winthrop Sawyer of 41 Humphreys St., Boston, and are as follows:

"Firearms in American History," Vol. I., 1910.

"Firearms in American History," Vol II., The Revolver., 1911.

"Our Rifles," Vol. III., 1920.

They are published by the Cornhill Co., Publishers, 2A Park St., Boston, Mass. They are rather expensive, being $4.50 each for the regular edition in cloth, and $7.00 each in limp leather.

Prof. Sawyer also published in paper-covered book, (I do not know if otherwise) in 1913, "United States Single-Shot Martial Pistols." I do not know if this can be obtained or not. Prof. Sawyer would, no doubt, be pleased to inform you.

I know of no large collectors who do not have them. I could, of course, give you an innumerable list of works on guns, but if you own Demmin, and Sawyer's four books, you will have all that you will probably ever require, outside the large public libraries, unless, like myself, you insist on owning everything in which you take interest.

Now, as to the "morning star." This weapon was a sort of mace, generally with a long handle, with its head embedded with wooden or iron points. It was common among the ancients, for many museums possess several fragments of these weapons belonging to the age of bronze. They were much used in Germany and Switzerland, receiving their name from the gruesome jest of wishing the enemy good morning with the morning star when they had been surprized in camp or city. Popular because so easily made. Peasants could make one with a trunk of a shrub and a handful of large nails. Also made for horsemen.

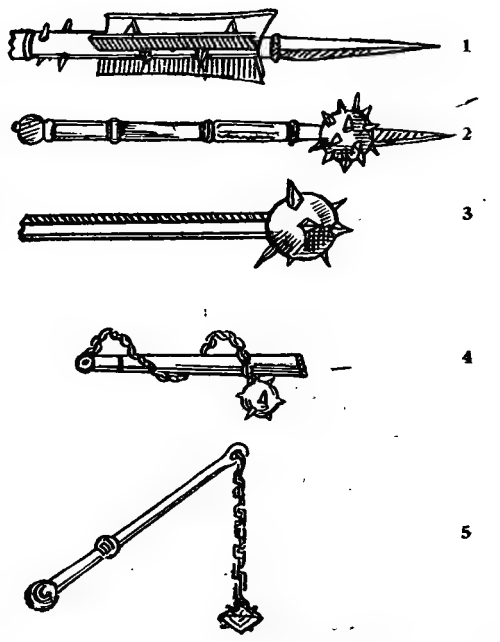
I am enclosing you some sketches of my own. No. 1 is Swiss, of the 15th century, on a long shaft. Length of the iron, which has four blades and a spike, is eighteen inches. No. 2 is a horseman's morning star of engraved iron, twenty-six inches in length, and has a dart or spike which starts from the handle by means of a spring. No. 3 is Swiss, of the 15th century, with a wooden ball studded with iron spikes. A few of these were supplemented with hand cannons.

Some writers have termed the military flail of "holy-water sprinkler," a morning star, claiming that it took its name from the star shape made by the spikes at the end of the chain. This is dubious, however, as many of them have no spikes—only an iron ball.

The name holy-water sprinkler was both from the shape and from the drops of blood which naturally spouted from those upon whom it was used. It was composed of shafts with whips, the latter either with or without iron points, or else of a shaft, to which was fastened a chain ending in an iron ball, or a wooden one studded with iron.

The first mention of this weapon is found in manuscripts of the beginning of the 11th century. A statue of this epoch in the Cathedral of Naumburg is armed with one of these, and so is the statue of the Palatine Oliver in the Cathedral of Verona. It was well known in Switzerland and Germany during the 15th century, and was used in England from the Norman conquest—1066—through the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547). No. 4 of the sketches is an English flail with chain and spiked ball on long shaft; reign of Henry VII (1485-1509). No. 5 is one in my own personal collection, being of the reign of Richard III of England (1484), and has a nineteen-inch iron shaft and seventeen-inch chain with lump of iron studded with short spikes.

I am also enclosing you one of my lecture circulars, which gives you a sketch of mine of one of my



MORNING STARS AND "HOLY-WATER SPRINKLERS." SKETCHES BY MR. BARKER. NUMERALS REFER TO EXPLANATIONS IN THE TEXT ON THIS PAGE.

cases of percussion dueling-pistols, by Blanchard of Paris, the finest all-round set of pistols of any kind that I ever saw.

In the brief time that I have had this department I have made several pleasant friends by correspondence who are weapon "cranks." One has sent me two pistols and I have sent him a Deringer and a flintlock. I shall be pleased to hear from you all about your collection, what you have, and to see photos of same, which I will carefully return, and will cheerfully write you at any time, although I will not always agree to be as verbose as this, for which you will probably say, "Thank——."

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

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Footgear in Alaska

KEEPING warm is mostly a matter of insulation, and leather doesn't insulate. Mr. Solomons has some pertinent remarks to make:

Question:—"Some time ago a statement in *Adventure* advised that in some parts of the extreme cold regions the natives often substituted woolen socks for leather shoes; that is, they left off the shoes entirely.

Can you tell me if this is a fact, and the reason it is done?"—C. CUTLER, Albuquerque, N. M.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Your question about substituting socks for leather shoes is a curious one. No one, least of all natives, ever wears leather shoes in very cold weather unless their journey is to be only a few hundred yards, or a few blocks in a city or town. That is if the weather is very cold. Many may walk a mile or two in leather shoes in a northern town, but the experience is not an agreeable or a safe one.

The reason is that a leather shoe is too stiff. If it is large enough to contain lots of sock thickness it will be too big for Summer wear and poor for any wear. If it is the usual fitting shoe it contains only one or two socks and is stiff enough to impede the circulation also by preventing the flexing of the foot to maintain that circulation.

Leather has no warmth whatever (practically speaking). Natives never wear them, except perhaps a few dandified ones in a small town, and that in Summer.

In the north people wear felt shoes very frequently. They are splendid for dry cold even out on the trails. I got so I used almost nothing else the last few Winters I spent roughing it in Alaska. But they're no good for Fall or Spring when it's sloppy. For the moment they become wet they wet the socks underneath and it's good-by!

The theory and correct practise as to Winter footwear is simple enough. There must be sufficient insulation from the cold. Hence wool or fur. There must be a covering pliable enough to permit all movements of the muscles of the feet so as to maintain circulation, and this covering must be of sufficient wearing quality to stand walking over whatever the surface may be.

In dry, cold weather the boot need not be water-tight, only snow-tight. In damp or wet going, however, it must be water-tight because the socks or fur underneath *must* be kept dry to maintain their function as non-conductors of heat (outward from the body).

In the north we wear rubber shoepacks or oil-tanned skin shoes of native make (mucklucks or a kind of moccasins); the former are made of seal with white whale hide or walrus or heavy seal-*back* soles (these *not* dry tanned) for Summer or sloppy weather in the Fall and Spring. Shoes in the Summer are the best, or rubber boots in the water. In Winter (dry cold) the mucklucks become of the dry, soft-tanned variety (not water-tight) and the Indian garment is the dry soft-tanned moccasin, preferably of moosehide. Or, felt shoes. A man can wear a felt boot such as lumbermen use in the north woods inside a rubber boot, but without protection it doesn't wear well.

So with ordinary heavy woolen socks. They are perfectly all right so far as keeping out cold, though the snow will gradually work in. But there is no wear to them unless protected by an outer covering.

A fur muckluck or other boot made soft-tanned with the fur left on and worn preferably inside makes often a sufficient protection for the feet with little or no socks inside. The reindeer or caribou skin is used for the purpose.

The nearest thing to what you ask me about that I have seen was when a "hausher" on the trail—an old-timer—stopped one day, took off his mucklucks and then peeled off one pair of socks; he probably had on several pair; and then put on his mucklucks again. I asked him why he had done that, because I had heard him complain of his feet being cold. He said his mucklucks were a little tight.

Thereafter his feet were perfectly warm. He was hitting the trail at a good gait and he now had circulation.

Mines and Farmlands of South Mexico

IF YOU want to exploit the wealth of either, you'll have to dig. There's big money in Mexico, but no easy money—at least, not for the ordinary fellow:

Question:—"What I want to know is, could a man make some money placer mining in your country, and what part would be best suited for that kind of work.

I would like also to know if there is good land for sale there by the Government. If so, in what part, and about what price?

Also, how is the climate along the coast? Is Mazatlan very hot in Summer? Is there any placer along the rivers in that part? If not, where would be the best place to go?

Are there any restrictions on a man going in for that purpose? I want to do a little prospecting first, then to make my home on a piece of land."—M. MCKENZIE, Sacramento, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—As mining has been carried on in Mexico for about three hundred years, and mining being the principal industry, naturally the Mexicans are no fools when it comes to mining, and most of the foreign companies have made their money by handling mines too big for them to handle, on account of water, lack of capital, etc.

In the Mazatlan consular district there are a number of placers, but none of them are being worked at present, and I assume that any worth-while placers have been worked over several times. All this part of the country has been pretty well worked over, although there are many old abandoned mines which would probably be worth while looking into. The natives all have prospects around the mining districts, and I really think it would pay to go into the farming business, as returns are surer.

The following are mining districts in the State of Sinaloa: Cosala, Copala, San José de Gracia, Rosario and Panuco. Most of the mines run good in silver, and carrying gold also.

As far as farming-land is concerned it would be best to buy from some large land owner as it takes much time and red tape to buy land from the Government, and any land worth while is usually under private ownership. Land is worth ten dollars an acre up, depending on class, locality and so on, making it necessary to be on the ground to make a buy.

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There are no restrictions to anybody prospecting that I know of. From the Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., you can buy a book containing all the mining laws of Mexico and all the other Latin countries.

There are two seasons in this part of Mexico—wet, commencing about June and lasting till October; and dry, from October to June. In Summer the climate is warm and hot, depending on the elevation. It would not take a great amount of dollars to go into farming if you handle the thing right, and it looks as if the revolutions had about run out, although no man knows.

There are all kinds of land here, mostly grown up with brush and trees, but good land when cleared. Labor is cheap here, and no fancy houses are needed as you can put a house native style, of poles and grass, which will shed water fine, and is cool.

Of course there are many drawbacks to any kind of business in Mexico, and you must be prepared to tackle anything, as all kinds of unforeseen things happen. The climate is trying to a newcomer until he becomes accustomed, and there are mosquitoes, gnats, ants, scorpions, snakes and bugs of all kinds galore.

However, it is a great life, and any one who gets the fever—that is, who lives here any length of time—hates to leave and usually comes back.

If you are an American citizen you would need a passport, secured through the U. S. District Court at Frisco, costing you ten dollars and taking about three weeks to get; also the visé of the Mexican consul, another ten dollars; although it is hard to tell how much longer this law will be in force.

Write to the Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., asking them for the "Supplement to Consular Reports" covering the Mazatlan consular district, which will give you much valuable data on this part of the country. Also send one dollar to the Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., for their book on Mexico and twenty-five cents for their large map of Mexico. A Mr. Kroll, Hotel France, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, has some very good maps of Sinaloa, up to date, costing two dollars and fifty cents or three dollars.

Any further information will be gladly sent you. If you write again send an International Reply Coupon, and I will answer by return mail. On account of not being able to use U. S. stamps except on north-bound mail steamers there may be some delay in letters sent that way.

There is an embargo on arms and ammunition in Mexico at present, although you can generally pick up a good shotgun or rifle here; but ammunition is very high.

Origin of the Japanese

IS THERE a common tie of blood between the Japanese, Chinese, Aleuts, North American Indians and the mysterious race which constructed the great monuments on Easter Island in mid-Pacific? And where do the Ainos and the pit-dwellers come in? Interesting questions, these, which the anthropologist will one day solve, if hard work can do it.

Question:—"I have been wondering whether you could supply me with some information of which I am in search and so have decided to write to you, knowing that you possess a considerable knowledge of the East and of Japan and its history.

Briefly the information which I require concerns the migration of Asiatic races across the Pacific to the American Continent. As you are aware, there is but little doubt that America was first peopled in prehistoric days by the crossing of Asiatics somewhere in the neighborhood of the Aleutians, if not farther south. Lately I have been collecting data and material with regard to this, but find the sphere to which I am restricted a small one indeed.

I would be obliged, therefore, if you could indicate to me any sources from which I might draw information, such as Japanese legends, etc., dealing with such a migration. I am much interested in the monuments on Easter Island, which no doubt have a close connection with this traverse of the ocean, and I would be glad to hear of anything which you know in regard to them.

Also, could you recommend to me a comprehensive text-book of Japanese history, with details as to price, etc. Where I might obtain it? If you should forward this letter to *Adventure* magazine, please do not make use of my name or address."—R. W.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—To the solving of the world's problems, as per your letter of February 27th.

Your communication holds extraordinary interest for me since you are studying from a physical standpoint what I am endeavoring to contemplate through psychological evidences. I doubtless am not the student you are in detail of your phase of the subject, but I may be able to offer some helpful general suggestions.

Authorities seem to divide the remains of Japan's antiquity into two classes: (1) relics of an early race still extant in the Ainos of Yezo; (2) historic remnants of immigrants from Asia—the ancestors of the present-day Japanese.

And at least one authority considers a third division in relics of the "pit-dwellers" of North Japan. It is believed that these dwellers antedated the Ainos in possession of Japan's islands, that they were driven north by the advancing Ainos, and that the present people of the Kurile Islands are their descendants.

It may be supposed, for purposes of investigation, that some of the more venturesome kept on going to the islands farther east along the American continent and maybe to the continent itself. Study of the relics, folk-lore, myths, superstitions, deity worship, games, etc., of all three of these divisions, in parallel with the ancient dwellers of Pacific and Alaskan islands, may furnish some material for interesting deductions.

For such study I refer you as follows:

> "Aino Fairy Tales," Basil Hall Chamberlain. "Myths and Legends of Japan," Davis F. Hadland. "Tales of Old Japan," A. B. F. Mitford. "Japanese Fairy World," Matthew Galbraith Perry. "Fairy Tales of Old Japan," William Elliot Griffis. "Ancient Tales of Folklore of Japan," R. Gordon Smith.

The above are fairly well-known books to be found in almost any well-stocked public library. Failing that, they are moderate-priced volumes that may be

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purchased through almost any up-to-date bookshop in your own city, or at Thrumm's Bookstore, Honolulu, T. H.; or Sancho Do & Co., Kanda, Tokio, Japan; or Daikokuya, Booksellers, Kyoto, Japan; or Aoki Taiseo-Do, San Francisco, Cal., U. S. A.

Orientalia Shop, 22 East 60th Street, New York, N. Y., U. S. A., have in stock "Warriors of Old Japan," by Yei Theodora Ozaki, at two dollars; and "Prehistoric Japan," by Neil Gordon Munro, at fifteen dollars. Both volumes will interest you if you can get hold of them.

"Asiatic Transactions," publications of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Yokohama, Japan, also the "Transactions" of the Japan Society of London, England, have from year to year brought out authoritative papers and articles covering the ground you wish to study. For deeper research work these articles are get-at-able by writing to the society and by paying for copying such information as you want.

The Mid-Pacific Magazine, Honolulu, T. H., has been publishing articles that will help you. Such is "Mythology of the Pacific," by J. McMillan Brown, January-June, 1920. The June article of this series is "Japan and Vulcanism." It deals with parallels of volcanic legends, etc. In the number of November, 1920, read "Among the Alaskan Tlinkats," by G. E. Kastengren.

For a history read "A History of the Japanese People," by Brinkley and Kibuchi; published by George H. Doran Company, 244 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y., U. S. A., price $4.50. I surmise that Messrs. Gordon & Gotch may be the Australasia agents for most of these publications. Doran publishes also A. Safroni-Middleton's "South Sea Foam," which see for legends and myths.

The latest Pacific investigations in line of ethnology are in the hands of the Bishop Museum Expedition, now in the field. I should advise you to get in touch with the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, T. H., for their published reports.

Any books you may get hold of written by Prof. J. McMillan Brown, of the University of New Zealand, will give you about everything known about the races of the Pacific. I'll stop here so as not to trespass upon the ground of "Ask Adventure's" South Sea experts.

If any of this helps you I shall be glad; and if it doesn't, come again, for I yet have a lot of similar dope stowed away.

Seal-Hunting on the Pacific Coast

TWO "Ask Adventure" experts treat of the matter, each from his individual point of view. This brace of letters shows how things are in the northern waters of the Pacific Coast States:

Question:—"Would like to ask a few questions in regard to sealing on the Pacific coast around California.

What tactics should I use in getting them? I understand they are destructive and there is a bounty on them.

What sort of a boat should I use and what kind of guns and requirements do I need?

How much money would it cost to rig up on everything? Am a mariner, but have never been sealing or fishing and have never been on the Pacific Coast."—CHARLES BEVAN, Springfield, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—Under the law the killing of fur seal in the open waters is strictly forbidden, although they are frightfully destructive of food-fish, the salmon men insisting that each fur seal kills his weight in fish every day. The only lawful way to kill them is to club them to death while on shore in the sanctuary of their breeding-grounds. The old sealing-fleet has been out of existence for years.

The hair seal, while destructive of food-fish, are not very common on this coast and there is no commercial killing of them. The only large herd is that of the Seal Rocks near the entrance of San Francisco, and they are preserved as an attraction to tourists.

In this State the fish commissioner keeps a small number of men employed hunting and killing the few hair seal that come into these waters, following the salmon run. The number that comes is at all times small, and I do not conceive of any possibility of making even wages in killing them as a private enterprise.

And here's how the matter shapes up in the eyes of a Southern Californian:

Question:—"I have heard that the States of Washington and Oregon pay a bounty of one dollar a head on sea-lions and seals. Is this so?

Are the animals plentiful enough for one to make a business of hunting them? Are there many hunters engaged in this business at present?

What methods are used to hunt them?

What seasons are best suited for one to hunt for them?

Are the hides of any value? What do you think of the scheme?

All information you may give me will be appreciated."—RALPH VAUGHAN, Pontiac, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Regarding sea-lions and seals—it is only a few days since I read that the fishermen of the North had clubbed together and wiped out, practically, the big seal herd at the mouth of the Columbia.

The fishermen hate them because they kill salmon and because they will go through a thousand-dollar net like a cannonball.

I don't believe you could earn a living at hunting them. Every boat that carries nets will have a rifle or two aboard, now that the law allows the killing of these animals.

These sea-lions—called seals by most folks—are shot while swimming in the water or perched on rocks. I have rowed a boat within thirty feet of a hundred in one group. I have poked a sea-lion with an oar to see his startled air when he wakened from a nap on top of the water.

All seasons are alike regarding them down here, for they are not killed in southern waters. In the north there are more of them, and the laws are different.

The skins should make fine leather, but taking the fat off would be some job. I don't know whether the hides are sold or not. I think not. If there was any money to be made in killing them, there are hundreds of fishermen and boatmen who would be after them.

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I have not heard of any bounty being paid on them, so far.

I have seen a man in bathing swim up to a sea-lion that would have weighed not less than seven hundred pounds, and the sea-lion smelled of him, then opened a big mouth and said *"Oughkl"* and dove. He came up and back to see the man again, swam around him, dove under him, poked him with an inquisitive nose and finally left him for good.

Do you think it much of a task to hunt a beast of that type?

It would not pay you to try it anyhow.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Bait for "Channel Cat"

A LURE that may yield the Mississippi angler a hundred-pound fish. They get their name, by the way, from their whiskers and because they purr when they're caught:

Question:—"Please tell me a good bait for channel catfish. I live on the Missouri River at Yankton, So. Dak., and try my luck in same once in a while. Enclosed please find stamped envelope for reply."—R. A. BOWYER, SR., Yankton, So. Dak.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—A good bait for channel catfish is minnows, the big chub, a dough made of flour, cheese and cotton; crawfish, fresh beef and liver.

Opportunities in Portuguese East Africa

THEY exist—excuse the bull—in Rhodesia and British East:

Question:—"Will you kindly send me information covering Portuguese East African trade, produce, opportunity, etc., and oblige.

I should be pleased, if opportunities exist in farming or mining (particularly coal-mining), if you would give me some information concerning them. I desire to start in a small way, say with 1,000 pounds capital."—WM. H. HOLLAND, Seattle, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Waring:—I would not recommend Portuguese East Africa to you for farming or coal-mining. It would be almost compulsory for you to know the Portuguese language in any event.

The conditions prevailing in Portugal are reflected to a large extent in its colonial administration, with the result that the colony is in a backward condition, very sparsely settled; and seemingly no efforts are put forth to improve existing conditions.

I would direct your attention to Rhodesia and British East Africa. The last-named is a healthy climate and is making rapid progress and offers far better opportunities to a man with your capital. Aside from this the conditions would be much more congenial, with an efficient administration, and every chance for a man to succeed.

Why not write to Mr. Beadle, in charge of the British East African section of "A. A."?

With regard to Rhodesia, there is considerable mining and farming in that country. This of course is British, and offers many advantages to settlers with a capital of one thousand pounds.

Preserving Your Firearms from Rust

GREASE will do it, if you use the right kind of grease:

Question:—"Would like to ask you a few questions if you will answer them for me.

I am enlisting in the U. S. Marine Corps and have a Winchester repeating rifle, model '95, .30-40 cal., solid frame with a 28-inch round barrel; and a Colts' auto pistol, .45 cal., Model 1911, which I want to pack away until I return.

If you will kindly tell me how to pack these guns to keep them from rusting until my four-year enlistment is up I will be very much pleased."—PAUL L. BOWMAN, Hamilton, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—The best way to preserve your rifle and pistol in good order is to clean them thoroughly, then coat them inside and out, and fill the mechanism thoroughly with some good heavy gun-grease like Corol, Winchester gun-grease, or Paravaseline. Any good, heavy grease will do, I find, except petroleum jelly (vaseline).

After so coating inside barrel and action, and coating heavily outside and in of the actions, wrap them in a heavily greased paper and lay them away in some dry place.

I think this will preserve them well, as I have tried it for a year in the Oregon Winters, which will rust firearms if anything will.

Trust this will be the desired information, and congratulate you on making the riffle for a leatherneck.

"King of the Mosquito Coast"

THAT title is good for a reminiscent grin among old-timers down Central America way:

Question:—"Could you give me any of the history of Belize? I've often wondered how that little piece of country could run a government of its own (or does it?) without being swallowed up by the larger nations around it. I don't know where to find anything about this country, so am asking you."—GEO. E. METCALF, Rockville, Conn.

Answer by Mr. Young:—British Honduras, of which Belize is the capital, is a British colony, governed by a governor assisted by negro soldiers from Jamaica Island. It is what remains of some thousands of square miles that were sliced off by England as her share of Central America years ago, the former lines taking in a great deal of what is now Spanish Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

This was done by giving power to a negro who was crowned by England with much ceremony and given the title of "King of the Mosquito Coast." He was taken to Jamaica, or one of the other islands, on a visit and during the night escaped and climbed to the top of a high tree, from which he was forcibly

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taken down the next morning. The ceremony of crowning this "king" is one of the most laughable incidents of modern history.

The present colony of British Honduras is one of the most backward in the whole word. See Encyclopedia Britannica under *British Honduras* for a sketch covering this colony, and for more definite knowledge write direct to Colonial Secretary, Belize, British Honduras.

"The Consols of the East"

JUST to be on the safe side, I'm going to quote the dictionary's definition of consols: "A contraction for 'consolidated annuities,' a British governmental security." And a security, it might be added, that to the British mind is as sure as death and taxes:

Question —"I would like a little information in regard to the Society Islands, but please don't print my name.

What are the living conditions in regard to climate and cost of living?

What would you say the income would be from six hundred coconut-trees, and can you kindly give me any information about marketing and culture of same?"— ———, San Diego, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—I am glad that you came to me for your information. You are not the first one to make such inquiries. More and more people are beginning to ask questions about this animal called the coconut.

The yearly income from six hundred trees would range from $600 to $900, according to market conditions of course. When I left Tahiti in November of 1920 copra (the dried meat of coconuts) was bringing as much as $150 a ton. One hundred trees, with forty nuts to the tree, will produce one ton of copra. Which made a tree worth $1.50 for last year. As a rule a planter will tell you that his tree will give him from $1 to $1.50 a year.

If you were growing coconuts in Tahiti you would market them in Papeete. And if your plantation was on an adjacent island you would either sell your copra on that island to one of the trading-house buyers or ship it into Papeete and sell it there.

Read the following books on coconut-culture:

"Coconuts, the Consols of the East"—Harold Hamel Smith and F. A. G. Pape. (Tropical Life Publishing Company, 83-91 Great Titchfield Street, Oxford Street, W., London.)

"All about Coconuts"—Roland Belfort and Alfred J. Hoyer. (The St. Catherine Press, 34 Norfolk Street, W. C., London.)

There are two seasons in the Society Islands, Spring and Summer, with the temperature running from 70 to 86 degrees. The nights are exceptionally cool.

Out in the districts of Tahiti one can live, native fashion, for as low as $20 a month. Life in Papeete will cost about $40 a month. This includes hotel expenses, laundry and other small incidentals.

Choosing a Pet Pup

NOBODY knows how they'll turn out when full grown:

Question:—I have the choice of five Airedale puppies; and, desiring the small kind, am thinking of picking the runt.

Is the runt usually as smart as the others, and how is his size when grown?"—EMMET T. HARRIS, Carbondale, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. St. John:—The runt in a litter of puppies is generally as smart as the others, sometimes smarter, but while his chances of being a smaller dog are greater, it does not always work out that way. My rule is always to take the puppy I like the best, regardless of his condition. In other words, selecting a puppy is largely a matter of sentiment—an affair of the heart rather than of the reason.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

SMITH, SGT. ALBERT R. Late of Co. M, 122nd Inf. and 144th Inf., A. E. F. Last heard of from Atlanta, Ga. Any information will be appreciated.—Address C. W. TURPEN, Clayton, Ga.

FILE, JAMES. Was at the Odd Fellows Home in Lincoln, Ill. Any one knowing his whereabouts kindly communicate with R. F. H., Care of *Adventure.*

BOWMAN, WESLEY. Drop a line to your old friend and pal.—Address CLYDE N. HALEY, Ward 33, U. S. P. H. S. Hospital No. 59, Tacoma, Wash.

WADE, ROBERT. Bob, if you remember Point Bonita in 1908-9 and a little time we had in the bake-shop, write a line to your old friend, TOM "ZIP" MOORE, Box 746, Newport News, Va.

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CHAPIN, E. W. Was with Northern Pacific Railway Company as cook in 1915. Was in Minneapolis, Minn. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. S. L. HARDWICK, 212 West 12th St., New York, N. Y.

HUGHES, JOHNNIE. Cousin. Was an old-timer in Alaska. Had become deaf from the Alaskan climate and had come to the States for ear treatment. Was very striking looking with long white hair. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MISS MAY A. E. DUFFY, 1876 Arthur Ave., New York, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

BRICE, NORMAN. Son. Formerly of Tampa, Florida. Six feet tall, weighs about 150 pounds, blue eyes, and dark brown hair. May be in Bridge Port, Texas, working in the oil-fields. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MAUD M. BRICE, Mansfield, Ark.

EVESHARN, TOMMY. Hart, Mat; Warren, A. J.; Moffet; Bounafon or any dynamiters who were shipmates with Tramp Rogers, West Coast, 1910-14. Write at once to GEORGE ROYSE, Care of Royse Furniture Store, Elwood, Indiana.

DAVIS, HARRY BEAN. Lived in O'Neils, Sonora, Eureka and San Francisco, Cal. Plays violin—has been interested in mining. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. FLORENCE B. DAVIS, Hotel Albert, 11th St., New York, N. Y.

PERRY, SAMUEL G. (Captain Carpenter.) Last heard of at Vancouver, 1888. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address MRS. ANNA UNDERWOOD, 4015 Hubbard Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE following have been inquired for in either the October 30th or November 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

BENNETT, MARY and FRANCIS; Coffin, Harry or Edward; Conoly, Pat; Curtis, Miner A.; De Moss, Bob; Dennis, John A.; Desparios, Roy B.; Cononui, August A.; Eyles, Emil F.; Cabelle, James; Gerritsen, Gerrit; Hall, Pvt. John or Sgt.; Haun, C. F.; Henderson, A. L.; Ingram, John Milton; Karnatz, "Chick;" Lieder, Joseph; Linds, Ralph; Lobber, Mrs. Eva; McNabb, Fred, Leo and Ethan; Mills, Lynden; Pedersen, Carl; Ross, Sturdy G.; Sigsbee, J. A.; Smith, Benjamin F.; Sramek, J. B.; Stubbs, Ralphy; Thomas, David L.; Walker, Oscar Newland; Wild, Harry; Wilde, Ted; Wilson, Robt. C.; Young, Ione.

MISCELLANEOUS: Boys who worked on Caro Ranches in Wyoming in the eighties; Marine Guard who served on U. S. S. North Carolina 1908-1911; Men who served on sub-chaser No. 37 from Christmas, 1918, to May 1st, 1919; Soldiers of Former 324th Aux. Remount, Sta., Waco, Texas; W. M. C.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

NOVEMBER 30TH ISSUE

In addition to the new Pendexter serial and the Off-the-Trail article mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will contain the following stories:

SLED WHEELER AND THE NAMELESS ORDER — **A Three-Part Story** — **Conclusion** — ***John I. Cochrane***

The sacred stones in the shadow of crime.

THE GOLD-SHIP — ***J. Allan Dunn***

It rose gleaming in the path of pirates.

GRAN' MOBI'S JEST — ***Hermann B. Deutsch***

Indian superstition in the Louisiana bayous.

THE INNOCENT BYSTANDER AND THE TRIANGLE — ***Trevor Nichols***

The pursuit of the shy second mate.

THE END OF THE TRAIL — ***Wilbur Watkins***

A drama of living and dying in the house of *Beaverhead* the Siwash.

THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE BLUFF — ***Raymond S. Spears***

Deadly doings in the oil country.

THE SHERIFF OF SUN-DOG — **A Complete Novelette** — ***W. C. Tuttle***

When sheep meet cattle it means war.

YELLOW TREASURE — **A Complete Novelette** — ***F. R. Buckley***

From China to San Francisco the curse follows the golden hoard.

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"How Can I Earn More Money?"

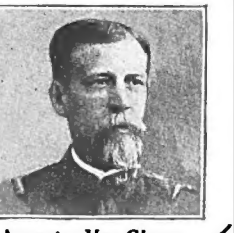
Let us solve your problem, too

We have solved the money problem for hundreds of men and women. Today they are confident and comfortable. They are earning $20—$40—$60—$100 a month extra.

Your spare time is all you need. That is the great feature of this opportunity. You can make money *in addition* to what your regular occupation pays you. Our work is so elastic that it fits into any one's day, and there is no limit to what you can earn. It is simply a question of how much money you want.

We pay you liberally for looking after our new and renewal subscriptions to EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, ADVENTURE, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER. Besides liberal cash commissions, from the very beginning, you can also receive a *regular monthly salary.* Simply sell us your spare time. Turn minutes into money and build up a permanent and profitable business.

You can do it!



Augustus Van Gieson

Mr. Augustus Van Gieson lives in New Jersey and was formerly employed by a big gas company. He was getting old—they wanted a younger man in his place, so out he went.

Mr. Van Gieson didn't know where to turn. He hunted a job, but other companies wanted younger men, too, and he lacked capital to go into business for himself. The road ahead looked long and hard.

A few weeks later he saw one of our advertisements for local Butterick Subscription Representatives. He wrote to us.

Today he is his own boss. He goes and comes as he pleases. By looking after new and renewal magazine subscriptions of his friends and neighbors he earns in excess of $1,500 a year.

What Mr. Van Gieson has done—what others have done—you can do also.

This is your opportunity to increase your income easily and surely. Experience is not necessary. We tell you how and furnish everything.

Establish yourself.

Return this coupon to us tonight. ☞

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Staff Agencies Division,
Box 756, Butterick Bldg.,
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DEAR SIR:

I need extra money. Tell me, without obligation, all about your plan for earning it in my spare time.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... *State* .....

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That Will-o'-the-Wisp—

Smartness

YOU'VE seen it in the swing of a skirt over a pert little pair of French heels. In the ball room you have found it in the caressing petals of some slim frock. It has teased you from the gay jauntiness of sports togs. Sometimes dashing, sometimes luring—what is this will-o'-the-wisp, this shy, elusive spirit of smartness?

Have you thought that only the original creator himself could capture this indefinable air of chic? That mere "home-made" clothes—no matter how beautifully sewn—could never embody the real charm of Paris?

Then you will be overjoyed to realize that the clothes which you make from now on may embody not only the perfect workmanship which has always been the product of your needle, but this hitherto elusive charm, the distinction that you thought belonged only to original models. More than that—these more wonderful clothes will actually cost less than any clothes ever cost you before?

Magic? No indeed—all because of the wonderful Deltor, a picture-guide individually planned for the particular garment you have chosen. A picture-and-word story of how Parisian professionals would put your very own frock together! Not a part of the pattern itself, but a separate service enclosed in the envelope with your Butterick Pattern. Ask for it—use it!

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Style Leaders of the World

The Deltor Saves 50c to $10 on Every Gown

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